

Associate-Candidate Relationships: A Study of Teacher Education Field Experiences

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Abstract

Past research has identified the importance of the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers during field experiences. Through the research questions that framed the study, I sought to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. Using an interpretive lens, I explored the associate teacher-teacher candidate relationships of 5 teacher candidates at a mid-sized university in Southern Ontario. In this instrumental multicase study, the 5 participants described 13 pairs of relationships with associate teachers who modeled varying practices. The qualitative data surrounding these case relationships were collected through a focus group and semistructured interviews. Participants' responses were analyzed using axial coding and constant comparative analysis. Participants identified feedback, guidance, support, genuine interactions, and relationship dynamics as central to successful field experiences. Participants also suggested that associate teachers might be better supported in their role if they were offered increased professional development from the faculties of education that organize the field experiences. The findings documented offer a fresh perspective of the role of the associate teacher in successful teacher education programs, particularly as experienced by the 5 participants.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This is a study of teacher candidate perceptions of their relationships with their associate teachers. The purpose of this study is to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. In Canada, formal teacher preparation occurs exclusively in university contexts that include lengthy field experiences (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Falkenberg, 2010). Thus, teacher educators, particularly the associate teachers who oversee candidates' field experiences, are central figures in exemplary teacher education (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). While the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers is a significant factor (Broad & Tessaro, 2010), these relationships are not always effective and can sometimes hinder teacher candidates' successes (Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009; Hudson, 2013). Through this study, I therefore undertake an exploration of the relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers, as perceived by five teacher candidates from a mid-sized university in Southern Ontario. I employed an instrumental multicase method to explore participants' experiences through a qualitative focus group and semistructured interviews (Heck, 2006; Stake, 2006). As the following chapters explore, these methods contribute to a clearer understanding of the participants' experiences and the associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship as a whole.

Personal Connection to Teacher Education

Qualitative research is necessarily informed by the researcher's own perspectives and biases (Creswell, 2014). As Kitchen (2005a) notes, "examining our personal and professional experiences [enables us] to become better teachers and teacher educators" (p. 18). To that end, my own interest in teacher education research stems from my experiences as a teacher

candidate. I graduated from Brock University's Intermediate/Senior teacher education program in June 2013 and have had informal conversations about the implications of teacher education with a variety of stakeholders since I began postsecondary studies in 2008. These experiences have contributed to my research interests in teacher education, particularly in how teacher candidates construct an understanding of their relationships with their associate teachers, and the effects such relationships have on their professional development. As a former teacher candidate, I have reflected on the relationships I had with my three associate teachers. Each of my own associates used different strategies and methods to develop our relationships; therefore I perceive these relationships and their outcomes quite differently. Through these relationships, I experienced both encouraging and challenging interactions, which prompted me to wonder which of my experiences were unique, and which were common to other teacher candidates. More importantly, I wondered what mentorship strategies were effective across these experiences, and how effective practices could contribute to further refining teacher education programs in the future. To that end, I became interested in speaking to other teacher candidates about their experiences to better understand how field experiences can contribute to exemplary teacher education. As a researcher, I also wondered how teacher candidates perceive the associate-candidate relationship. Further, how can associate teachers support candidates' needs in ways that are consistent with program visions and professional standards? Finally, how do participants' experiences contribute to a developing understanding of effective teacher education? These questions are the focus of my research interests and inform my approach to this study.

Background of the Problem

Teacher education programs are a critical period of professional development for Canadian teachers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005) report *Teachers Matter* noted that “teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement” (p. 2). Thus, to effectively educate students, we must first effectively educate teachers (Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, & McIntyre, 2008; Huling, 2006b). Field experiences are particularly important for preparing teachers, since these experiences allow candidates to apply their understanding of educational theory and refine their professional practice (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Resta (2006) and Cochran-Smith et al. (2008) similarly note that teacher education is an essential process for beginning teachers, particularly as an opportunity for mentorship into the profession. The relationships between associate teachers and teacher candidates are therefore central to the field experience. Kosnik and Beck (2006) note that effective associate teachers “give strong social and emotional support, thus enabling learners to take risks and develop ownership of their learning” (p. 12). While the literature recognizes the importance of this relationship and the traits of exemplary associates (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Hudson, 2013; Volante, 2006), how these relationships are developed remains unclear (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Foster, Wimmer, Winter, & Snart, 2010). What makes an effective associate-candidate relationship, and how can associate teachers support candidates’ needs in a way that is consistent with program visions and professional standards (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013)? My goal for this thesis is to understand (a) how the participating teacher candidates perceive their own field experience needs, (b) how the associate-candidate relationship is

developed, and (c) how implications of the field experience affect both new and practicing teachers.

Statement of the Problem Context

Despite ongoing research interest in teacher education practices, the substance of Canadian teacher education programs and their practicum components remains unclear. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) note that “there has been little analysis about what actually happens in a teacher education program and how the experience adds up to a set of knowledge, skills, and practices that influence teacher efficacy in the classroom” (p. 11). Creating effective associate-candidate relationships goes beyond structurally allowing for those relationships to occur (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). Kosnik and Beck (2009) observe that the associate-candidate relationship is often underdeveloped in favour of teacher candidates trying to prove themselves, rather than learning from their mentors. McDiarmid and Clevenger-Bright (2008) similarly note that “resources and attention have been disproportionately focused on the development of teachers as individual practitioners, as opposed to members of local ‘communities of practice’” (p. 145). Thus, despite the importance of the associate-candidate relationship, the development of this relationship remains underrepresented in the literature. Research in teacher education acknowledges the socializing role of field experiences, but does not fully capture the associate-candidate relationship (Broad & Tessaro, 2010).

Effective behaviours in associate-candidate relationships are well-documented (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). How such behaviours can be implemented in field experiences, however, is less clear. Broad and Tessaro (2010) note that “there is general agreement, in the literature and the field, that the role of associate teacher is poorly defined and that often

expectations are ambiguous and overlapping” (p. 80). Indeed, relationships between teacher candidates and their associate teachers vary widely in their effectiveness (Goodwin & Oylar, 2008; Huling, 2006b). Effective collaboration between teacher candidates and their mentors requires explicit study of exemplary associate teacher practices as it relates to teacher candidates’ growth (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). To that end, Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage (2005) note that the focus should be “not on the format, length, or location of teacher education but on its substance: what prospective teachers need to learn and how they may best be enabled to learn it” (p. 4). The importance of the associate-candidate relationship is not in question. Rather, through this study, I explore teacher candidates’ perceptions of what exemplary associate teachers can do to develop the effective relationships outlined in the literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. As Basile (2006) notes, “it would be enormously valuable to discern the specific and patterned mentor behaviours that engender protégé feelings of optimism with regard to the teaching profession” (p. 13). Goodwin and Oylar (2008) similarly contend that further research in teacher education should focus on practicums and the lived experiences of teacher candidates. Associate teachers’ mentorship role is critical to the teacher candidate field experience. Through this study, I therefore explore participants’ perceptions of their needs in the field experience, how the associate-candidate relationship is developed, what interactions contribute to these relationships, and how these relationships enable teacher candidates to succeed in their field experiences. Rather than contribute to the widespread condemnations of

the shortfalls of teacher education (as described by Bullock & Russell, 2010; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), this study captures the lived experiences of 13 associate-candidate relationships as described by the five participating teacher candidates. Through the research questions identified in the following section, I seek to use these participants' voices to further clarify the nature of the associate-candidate relationship and enhance preparation programs for future teacher candidates.

Research Questions

The research questions were raised to better understand how the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers could contribute to exemplary teacher education. The central question of this study is: From the perspective of teacher candidates, what makes an effective associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship? This question guided my exploration of the associate-candidate relationship, particularly in my discussions with the participants. Three further research questions formed the basis of my inquiry, and were supported by related sub-questions that explored elements of the research focus:

1. How do teacher candidates perceive the associate-candidate relationship?
 - a) What are their experiences with their associate teachers?
 - b) What specific interactions have they had with their associate teachers, and what behaviours/characteristics did their associate teachers model during their field experiences?
 - c) Of these interactions, which were helpful? Which strategies worked? What was challenging about their interactions?
 - d) What interactions/experiences were needed, and what interactions did they not have that they would have wanted?

2. From the perspective of teacher candidates, how can associate teachers support candidates' needs in a way that is consistent with program visions and professional standards?
 - a) What patterns, if any, arise between individual participants and the focus group?
 - b) How do participants' perceptions compare to the existing literature on effective teacher education and exemplary associate teacher practices?
 - c) How are practices outlined in the literature enacted by actual associate teachers? What similarities and differences occur across participants' experiences?
3. How do participants' field experiences contribute to a developing understanding of effective teacher education?
 - a) What clarity and insights, if any, do these experiences provide?
 - b) How are effective practices being enacted, and how can those practices be carried across other teacher education programs?
 - c) What inconsistencies or shortfalls exist, and how might teacher educators and associate teachers better respond to teacher candidates' perceived needs?

Research questions were developed to explore participants' experiences in relation to the existing literature. The first question sought to examine teacher candidates' perceptions of their own field experiences and the relationships they developed with their associate teachers. Between the five participants in the study, 13 such relationships (i.e., cases) were explored. This question positioned the associate-candidate relationship as the focus of the investigation and revealed how the participants perceived this core element of teacher

preparation (Foster et al., 2010; Huling, 2006b). The second question placed individual participants' responses in wider context with others' experiences as well as existing questions in teacher education literature (Elliott-Johns & Ridler, 2010). The third question highlighted an emphasis on contributing to an understanding of the substance of the associate-candidate relationship and to a broader understanding of effective teacher education (Feimer-Nemser, 2008; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008).

Rationale

Through this study, I aim to contribute to a growing body of research in teacher education and further clarify how associate teachers can effectively mentor teacher candidates placed in their classrooms. As McDiarmid and Clevenger-Bright (2008) note, “the act of teaching is socially and politically negotiated. What teachers can and cannot do within their classrooms depends, in large part, on others in their surround” (p. 144). Teacher candidates' choices during field experiences are mediated by their associate teachers. Despite this dependency, associate teachers have long lacked consistent preparation for their role (Falkenberg, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994; Rideout & Koot, 2009). Associate teachers, teacher candidates, and faculty members should therefore know how the associate-candidate relationship can be developed effectively (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). Stakeholder decisions in teacher education should be based on a common vision for teacher education grounded in systematic research (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). In effect, this study is intended to enhance teacher educators' ability to provide better support and preparation for teacher candidates as they engage in their practicum placements.

Exemplary teacher education requires an effective relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. For Haberman and Post (2008), “having a credible

teacher mentor actively coach them in their own classroom is the way star teachers prefer to practice and learn” (p. 364). While some teacher candidates already experience this credible mentorship, not all associate teachers are prepared to demonstrate the exemplary traits outlined in the literature. The substance of supportive mentorships between associate teachers and their teacher candidates is central to efforts to refine Canada’s teacher education programs (Kosnik & Beck, 2006; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). As Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage (2005) note, “if teachers are to have access to the knowledge available to inform their practice, such consensus must become a reality” (p. 9). Associate teachers and teacher candidates should not be left to guess at how to develop an effective relationship. This study is intended to address this gap in teacher education literature.

Beyond the benefits to their role as teacher candidates, participants in the study had the opportunity to benefit as individual educators. Teacher education is an ongoing, complex process. By exploring their field experiences in the study, participants had the opportunity to “develop their own metacognitive knowledge and regulation – in order to reflect systematically and effectively about their own practice, and to develop metacognitive abilities in students” (Robinson, 2008, p. 385). That is, by reflecting on their own experiences, participants had the opportunity to think of their field experiences in new ways as they continue to develop as professional educators. As Robinson notes, this process may also help participants to develop reflective skills in their future students.

This study is particularly important in the current context of Ontario teacher education. As Ontario institutions adjust to recent changes in legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), faculty members must consider the impact of field experiences on candidates and their future students. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) observe that

changes in teacher education are both politicized and complex. The Ontario Ministry of Education's (2013b) decision to mandate "a minimum of 80 days of practical experience" (section 1.1v) will affect teacher candidates and the nature of the associate-candidate relationship. To that end, I aim to explore the associate-candidate relationship so that stakeholders in teacher education may adjust to legislated changes effectively and with reference to specific research.

The study may be of particular interest to the site of study and its various teacher education stakeholders. Participants were drawn from a single teacher education program, and therefore offer insights which represent the immediate context for that institution. As Cochran-Smith et al. (2008) note, "without a firm foundation, programs and innovations are based on slogans and panaceas" (p. xxxi). Teacher education and the associate-candidate relationship are essential parts of teacher preparation, and as such should be supported by clear research into how exemplary behaviours can be modelled for teacher candidates entering Ontario's revised programs.

Theoretical Framework

The relationships and contexts of teacher education programs inform candidates' understandings of their practicum experience. This instrumental multicase study was approached using an interpretive lens to explore these understandings as described by teacher candidates themselves, which is further described in Chapter Three of this study (Bean, 2006; Krueger, 1998a; Wolcott, 1994). Teacher candidates perceive their experiences differently than their advisors and associate teachers, and develop core concepts of their professional practice through their field experiences (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). To that end, Borko, Whitcomb, and Byrnes (2008) note that "participants' voices and discourses are

critical to capture . . . to share how they make sense of their practice” (p. 1026). Rather than assigning meaning to candidates’ experiences, I seek to draw out the localized meanings of participating teacher candidates (Borko et al., 2008). This interpretive approach reflects Kosnik and Beck’s (2006) notion of constructivist teacher education, as well as Darling-Hammond and Bransford’s (2005) concept of teacher expertise. The constructivist approach emphasizes the importance of contextualized knowledge that is evolving constantly through individual and group interpretation (Kosnik & Beck, 2006). Similarly, developing teacher expertise reflects the Piagetian notion of “the constructive nature of knowing” (Bransford, Derry, Berliner, & Hammerness, 2005, p. 52). Thus, I elicited responses from teacher candidates as they reflected on their associate-candidate relationships both in individual interviews and a focus group (Martin & Russell, 2010). This variety of perspectives allowed participants to develop new understandings for their own experiences, and offers new insights about their significance (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Wood and Waarich-Fishman’s (2006) study of new teacher induction programs similarly “facilitate[d] an understanding of how novice teachers perceive and interpret their lived experiences” by means of an interpretive lens (p. 73). This study, therefore, foregrounds teacher candidates’ developing expertise and constructed knowledge in order to better understand the teacher education experience and the associate-candidate relationship. These experiences, in turn, clarify how associate teachers and teacher candidates can best develop effective relationships to improve the field experience for future teacher candidates.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This is a study of teacher candidate perceptions of their relationships with their associate teachers. As such, this study does not include associate teachers’ perceptions of the

associate-candidate relationship, or the perceptions of other stakeholders in teacher education. Further, as I have not served as an associate teacher, I acknowledge that I am an outsider to the perspectives of associate teachers. Thus, while I aim to voice the constructed understandings of the participating teacher candidates, I acknowledge that other stakeholders would offer different perceptions and understandings. Further, participants' constructed meanings are limited to the scope of their own experiences. This study includes specific meanings as they are constructed by participants, and is not designed to generalize to all teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005). Thus, readers should consider their own contexts when comparing this study to their own experiences. Chapter Three further delineates the methodological scope and limitations of this study. In sum, while this study does include an investigation of the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers and how such relationships might be developed effectively, this study is not meant to generalize beyond the lived experience of its participants in their various contexts (Bean, 2006; Toma, 2006).

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

The remaining chapters of this document describe the context, design, and results of the study in question. In particular, these chapters explore the existing literature in teacher education, the methods chosen for this study, and the results and recommendations arising from the research. These chapters are entitled as follows: Review of Related Literature, Methodology and Research Design, Presentation of Results, and Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations.

Chapter Two comprises a literature review, organized conceptually, to explore existing research in teacher education. This chapter considers the current context of teacher

education and the challenges and critiques affecting the field. The chapter continues with an exploration of the literature relating to field experiences, especially as it relates to teacher candidates and their associate teachers. This review provides a framing context for the current study and its research questions.

Chapter Three describes the methodological features of the study. These features include the selected method and design, as well as the site of study and selected participants. Chapter Three also unpacks the instrumentation used for data collection and subsequent data analysis. Further, the chapter includes the methodological assumptions, limitations, credibility efforts, and ethical considerations inherent to the study.

Chapter Four presents the findings of the study as described by the participants. The research findings are reported by themes emerging from both the participants' responses and the literature explored in Chapter Two.

Chapter Five offers a summary of the study as well as a discussion of the research findings presented in the previous chapter. This discussion leads to a series of recommendations for both practice and future research. That is, this final chapter considers the implications of the study as they relate to teacher candidates, associate teachers, faculties of education, and teacher education researchers as they each proceed within their respective contexts.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teacher education literature explores a variety of structures, stakeholders, and perspectives. This chapter unpacks this literature conceptually, discussing areas of the field as they approach the focus of the teacher candidate as a participant in the associate-candidate relationship. The following sections explore the current context of teacher education, the challenges and critiques that this context produces, and the role of research in teacher education. Further, this chapter considers the nature of the field experience, as well as the role of the associate teacher and the role of the teacher candidate. The literature review concludes with an exploration of the interpretive and constructivist lenses, which inform this study's investigation of teacher candidates and their perceptions of the associate-candidate relationship in teacher education.

Current Context in Teacher Education

Canadian teacher education is spread across 56 institutions that in 2003 graduated some 18,000 teachers, including over 8,000 new teachers from Ontario universities (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). As Resta (2006) notes, the effectiveness of these teachers is “the major determinant of student academic progress” (p. 103), necessitating thoughtful preparation of Ontario's teachers so that they are able to effectively meet students' needs (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006). In Canada, formal preparation occurs exclusively in the university context (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Falkenberg, 2010). This context, however, varies between regions. Ontario teacher education programs are amongst Canada's shortest, with consecutive routes (programs taken after completing an undergraduate degree) usually lasting only two semesters (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Concurrent degree routes (programs taken alongside an undergraduate degree) offer

further variation, though these longer programs are not offered at the majority of Canada's faculties of teacher education (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

Within the postsecondary context, teacher educators and faculties of education work to prepare their students for field experience (or practicum) placements and entry into the broader profession. Teacher candidates' development, therefore, is tied to both their university context and their experiences with teacher educators and related stakeholders (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). Teacher educators determine the topics and perspectives that candidates are exposed to during the course component of these programs (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Field experiences are similarly influenced by both program requirements and associate teacher practices (Falkenberg, 2010). Since certification often involves no preparation beyond teacher education (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), teacher educators are viewed as "gatekeepers for the state and the profession" (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008, p. 476). As gatekeepers, teacher educators develop candidates' theoretical, practical, and pedagogical knowledge as they enter the profession (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2006). Field experiences, accordingly, aim to foster inquiry, reflection, and collaboration as teacher candidates cross from the university context into the classroom (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2006; Schulz, 2005; Smits, 2010).

The gatekeeper role, however, is not straightforward. As Darling-Hammond (2006) notes, Canadian teachers are expected to foster excellence for all students, not just traditionally successful student groups. This expectation extends to teacher educators as they prepare teacher candidates. That is, the changing role of teachers requires teacher educators to change to meet candidates' own needs (Darling-Hammond, 2006), particularly since only 13% of graduates rate their teacher education experiences as "excellent" (Crocker & Dibbon,

2008, p. ix). Whether in an effort to better prepare teacher candidates or in response to new legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), teacher education programs face a period of considerable change (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

Challenges and Critiques of Teacher Education

The shifting context of teacher education has produced a variety of criticisms. As a complex process involving a variety of stakeholders with competing interests (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), teacher education is easily criticized. Goodwin and Oyler (2008) note that “there is no shortage of condemnation of teacher education – what it should or should not do, and whether it should exist at all” (p. 470). Such criticisms are longstanding (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005a), due in part to the relative recency of research in teacher education (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005b). Teacher education, particularly in shorter programs, is criticized as unable to change candidates’ tendencies or adequately prepare them for entry into the profession (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, & Shulman, 2005). Teacher educators’ roles are similarly challenged, as different faculties and instructors offer conflicting views of proper teacher training (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Teacher candidates themselves do not view teacher education in the same ways as their instructors. In Crocker and Dibbon’s pan-Canadian study, graduates cited a range of under-emphasized skills that they considered key to effective teacher education, including classroom management, student motivation, and interactions with other stakeholders. The critiques of teacher education programs are complicated further by how these conflicting views are implemented. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) note that teacher education in the latter half of the 20th century was both superficial and fragmented. This charge of fragmentation continues to be laid in the 21st century, as teacher preparation programs are

viewed as overly broad and unable to connect course materials to teaching experiences (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Teacher education programs also face the logistical challenge of collaborating with outside stakeholders who do not necessarily share the same vision for teacher preparation (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). Thus, critics of current teacher education practices wonder if teacher candidates are able to appraise their education in a way that effectively prepares them to enter the profession (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). These critiques are not limited to the Canadian context. Speaking of the United States, Shulman (2005) contends that:

Teacher education does not exist. . . . There is so much variation among all programs in visions of good teaching, standards for admission, rigour of subject matter preparation, what is taught and what is learned, character of supervised clinical experience, and quality of evaluation that, compared to any other profession, the sense of chaos is inescapable. (p. 7)

To that end, inconsistency poses a central challenge for advancing a common teacher education experience in Ontario. This is not to suggest that all teacher education programs must be identical. Rather, teacher educators are attempting to communicate and understand contextual differences (Kitchen & Petrarca, in press) to reduce what Rideout and Koot (2009) describe as the “idiosyncratic nature” of candidates’ lived experiences (p. 935). Notions such as effective, successful, and qualified field experiences, while consistently desired in teacher education programs, vary widely from institution to institution (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Goodwin & Oyler, 2008; Rideout & Koot, 2009). A Quebec study (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010) observed that faculty supervisors and associate teachers only agreed a field experience was successful in 43% of the explored cases. As a result, teacher candidates struggle to integrate

high volumes of conflicting guidance into their actual teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Kosnik and Beck (2009) contend that “teacher educators’ views about what is important vary even within the same preparation program, and these views often are at odds with government and school district policies and practices and parental expectations” (pp. 1-2). Thus, inconsistent views of teacher education extend beyond disputes in the literature, and may impact teacher candidates’ ability to become effective educators in their own right.

The critiques of teacher education have prompted teacher educators to seek out different ways of constructing Canada’s teacher education programs (Kosnik & Beck, 2006). How teacher education should change, however, is not immediately clear. Teacher educators’ diverse perspectives have resulted in suggestions to lengthen, curtail, and amend a wide range of program elements (Kosnik & Beck, 2006). In Ontario, some aspects of change have been mandated province-wide with the introduction of Regulation 283-13 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), which requires Ontario institutions to extend all teacher preparation programs from two to four semesters. Beginning in September 2015, programs in Ontario will include a minimum of 80 days of field experiences (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b), a considerable increase from the current minimum of 40 days. Program admission rates will also be reduced by 50% in response to rising unemployment among the graduate population (Kitchen & Petrarca, in press; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). These pressures on teacher education reflect what Kosnik and Beck (2006) refer to as an atmosphere of “both hope and despair” (p. 1). Teacher educators must respond to these challenges in order to continue to prepare teacher candidates to enter the profession.

In this context of pressure and criticism, teacher educators are calling for a more consistent collaboration between institutions, and most particularly, between programs and the school boards they partner with (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2006, 2009). Canadian teachers are now expected to prepare students for success across a range of areas, necessitating teacher preparation programs that reflect a consistent, linked vision throughout the teacher education experience (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2006, 2009). There is further support for linking institutional visions with students' field placements, so that preparations in the classroom are consistent with candidates' teaching experiences (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Enhancing collaboration between universities and school boards would improve the nature of the field experience and provide associate teachers with access to more resources when welcoming candidates into their classrooms (Dillon & O'Connor, 2010; Foster et al., 2010; Rideout & Koot, 2009). Moreover, consistent practices within teacher education programs enable candidates to develop pedagogy that links across their experiences as they progress through their teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005). In this context, teacher educators and education researchers must explore which interactions, ideas, and practices are consistent with institutional visions and with effective teacher preparation.

Research in Teacher Education

Despite widespread interest in teacher education and teacher quality (Godwin & Oyler, 2008), research in teacher education is still developing. As Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) note, the field's history is limited mostly to the latter half of the 20th

century. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) observe that there are gaps in the pan-Canadian context, particularly in connecting structural aims with the actual experiences of teacher candidates. Research specific to the Ontario context is similarly limited (Kitchen & Petrarca, in press). Thus, much of the literature in teacher education is drawn from other contexts, particularly studies exploring teacher education as it exists in the United States (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Levine, 2006; Shulman, 2005). In this study, I attempt to utilize Canadian contexts whenever possible, particularly given the organizational differences between American and Canadian teacher education. Non-Canadian sources are also included, reflecting Crocker and Dibbon's (2008) recognition of the gaps in the Canadian context that might otherwise present a limited picture of teacher education research.

Recognizing the developing nature of teacher education research, Borko et al. (2008) detail a number of previous studies of teacher education and the teacher candidate experience. Previous studies include both experimental and correlational designs, and broadly "seek to understand the relationship between . . . characteristics of teacher candidates, features of teacher education programs and practices, and the learning of teacher candidates" (Borko et al., 2008, p. 1022). Across such studies, Borko et al. contend that teacher education researchers attempt to understand the relationships between teacher candidates' experiences and effective teacher preparation. By improving our understanding of how to prepare teachers effectively, researchers in teacher education aim to reduce the need for repeated corrective reforms that are often disconnected from the lived experiences of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Orlofsky, 2001). As Kosnik and Beck (2009) suggest, this requires teacher educators to ensure they support their teacher candidates as they engage in their field experiences. Levine (2006) further notes that teacher education

programs must have an explicit purpose, a consistent and balanced curriculum, and that these programs must provide and have access to fiscal and human resources to ensure that teachers are able to meet high preparation standards. Teacher educators, candidates, and school stakeholders seem to support connecting these efforts to a common event of all Canadian teacher preparation programs: the field experience (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

Field Experiences

Canadian faculties of teacher education dedicate large portions of their programs to field experiences and practicum placements (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). In part, teacher educators rely on other stakeholders for program success (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), and yet field experiences are often not integrated with the values or content of university-based classes in such programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). There is further disconnect between what is known about exemplary field experiences and what actually happens in these placements. As Goodwin and Oyler note, studies of effective practicum factors often do not consider how these factors are implemented, experienced by teacher candidates, and evaluated by the institution. Further, while faculty members rate their collaborative relationships with school stakeholders as strong, principals rate these same relationships poorly (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). These limitations are particularly challenging given inconsistencies in how stakeholders evaluate teacher candidates, how those evaluations are determined, and whether those evaluations are representative of future teaching ability (Clift & Brady, 2005; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Falkenberg & Young, 2010). As teacher educators revise the programs at their institutions, they must consider how the practicum is implemented, and how that experience will link with the broader teacher education program (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005).

New teachers' ability to teach effectively depends in part on the support and preparation they receive in their teacher education programs (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). Creating consistency within a teacher education program does not require a uniform experience for all candidates, but does require that field experiences be rooted in conscious decisions about what students should experience and what strategies the program will use to ensure their success (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005). As Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) note, field experiences are more effective when they reiterate a program's vision and provide associate teachers with information about the institution's aims. Further, ongoing, lasting field experiences seem to better prepare teacher candidates for entry into the profession when compared to multiple, shorter experiences (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005). Dillon and O'Connor (2010) similarly contend that teacher education programs must include at least 30 weeks of field experiences to benefit candidates or the schools they are placed in. This may place current Ontario programs at a disadvantage, as Ontario's field experiences are amongst Canada's shortest (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). As Crocker and Dibbon note, most field experiences in Ontario last between 10-14 weeks, whereas "the median practicum length [across Canada] is 13-20 weeks" (p. x). Regardless of their structure, however, such experiences are most impactful when the practicum offers critical, inquiry-based experiences that go beyond mimicry or replication (Bullock & Russell, 2010).

When successful, field experiences offer teacher candidates an opportunity to integrate their university course work in a collaborative environment where reflection is encouraged (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Such environments depend upon successful mentor pairings (Hobson et al., 2009), and yet teacher

candidates' practicum placements are often determined by administrative convenience (Bullock & Russell, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). As Falkenberg (2010) notes, schools are built for teaching students, not teaching teachers, creating challenges for both teacher candidates and the associate teachers they are paired with (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010; Nielsen, Triggs, Clarke, & Collins, 2010). Teacher education begins in such contexts. Recognizing these challenges, Martin and Russell (2010) and Zeichner and Conklin (2008) contend that field experiences are most effective when teacher candidates experience the guidance, collegiality, and support of a strong associate-candidate relationship.

Role of the Associate Teacher

Teacher educators must strive to develop effective, collaborative relationships with partner schools and the associate teachers who work there (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & LePage, 2005). Enhancing such collaboration recognizes the central role of the associate teacher and increases consistency between university course work and practicum experiences (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008). As Broad and Tessaro (2010) note, the relationship between a teacher candidate and their associate teacher is “a significant factor in the development of [professional] knowledge” (p. 80). This relationship may be most successful when an atmosphere of collaboration allows teacher candidates to develop and challenge their abilities (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Bullock & Russell, 2010). Indeed, Flores (2006) contends that such dynamics serve to benefit both teacher candidates and their mentors. Similarly, elements of trust and friendship seem to enhance the associate-candidate relationship, particularly when the associate teacher allows the teacher candidate to be innovative during the field experience (Schulz, 2005; Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). The relationship is not without challenges, however. Overly friendly associate teachers may not be able to provide

objective critique (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), and some teacher candidates may choose not to heed their mentor's advice (Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). Tensions between associate teachers and teacher candidates limit the effectiveness of the field experience and have adverse emotional effects on candidates who find themselves in unsupportive relationships (Hobson et al., 2009; Hudson, 2013). Thus, despite the potential benefits of the associate-candidate relationships, the precise nature of the associate teacher remains contested in teacher education literature.

Field experiences must be supervised by associate teachers who are required to open their classrooms to aspiring teachers (Falkenberg & Young, 2010; Kitchen & Petrarca, in press). Such requirements, however, do not guarantee an effective dynamic. Associate teachers must be willing participants in the associate-candidate relationship, and should be prepared to serve as guides and coaches rather than position themselves as experts (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Dillon & O'Connor, 2010; Falkenberg, 2010). For many years, candidates have suggested that teacher educators improve the selection and preparation of associate teachers, and yet most institutions do not have complete control over which associate teachers are available or where individual candidates are placed (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008; Tisher & Wideen, 1990). This structure limits the relationship between associate teachers and teacher educators, as teacher educators are often unable to individually select or train associate teachers to meet particular candidates' needs. Further, this dynamic reduces associates' abilities to act as effective "gatekeepers" to the teaching profession (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008, p. 480). While some programs empower associate teachers to judge the success or failure of a practicum experience (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010), Nielsen et al. (2010) contend that associate teachers "are often regarded as little more than ad-hoc overseers" with

limited input to teacher education programs (p. 840). This perception limits associate teachers' abilities to effectively contribute to teacher candidate development.

Despite these challenges, associate teachers continue to play a prominent part in the preparation of Canadian teachers. Associate teachers take on a number of roles in their effort to mentor teacher candidates while they reflect on their experiences (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Broad & Tessaro, 2010; Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010). Beyond the structure or length of the field experience, the strategies and pedagogies modeled by associate teachers have profound effects on teacher candidates' experiences (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005). In reference to teacher induction programs, Huling (2006a) notes that "the mentoring that occurs between an experienced teacher and a novice teacher is the most important aspect of [teacher preparation]" (p. 4). Similarly, in teacher education, the associate teacher has unparalleled access to teacher candidates when they are actually teaching. Effective field experiences include strong, supportive relationships between associate teachers and teacher candidates (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). These relationships are rooted in frequent, focused feedback that extends beyond requiring teacher candidates to mimic associate teacher practices (Broad & Tessaro, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2010). Aitken and Krueger and Rideout and Koot (2009) similarly note that interactions should be dialogue-based and should encourage teacher candidates to reflect on their experiences. Effective associate teachers provide teacher candidates enough autonomy to act on these reflections, while still providing moral and emotional support throughout the practicum (Flores, 2006; Hobson et al., 2009). In this way, associate teachers who provide clear mentorship and guidance to teacher candidates are critical to the field experience (Huling, 2006b).

Associate teachers mentor and develop professional relationships with the teacher candidates placed in their classrooms. For this associate-candidate relationship to be effective, associate teachers should be prepared with strategies and practices for guiding teacher candidates through the field experience (Flores, 2006). Effective teachers are not necessarily effective mentors: associate teachers' perceptions of being a mentor, as well as their preparedness to do so, will influence their effectiveness with teacher candidates (Falkenberg, 2010; Hobson et al., 2009; Yendel-Hoppey & Dana, 2006). In many cases, associate teacher preparation is limited to a summary of practicum structures and a point of contact for when the associate-candidate relationship is unsuccessful (Falkenberg, 2010). As the Ontario Ministry of Education (1994) recommends, however, some teacher education programs also provide their associate teachers with professional development to support them in their roles. Such programs exist in several Canadian institutions, offering associate teachers the opportunity to refine their mentorship, communication, and feedback skills (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010; Foster et al., 2010; Mulholland, Nolan, & Salm, 2010). Where these programs exist, practicing teachers receive professional development and further enhance their ability to contribute to effective teacher education.

Teacher candidates learn more from field experiences (a) where they have the opportunity to discuss teaching practices with other teachers; (b) where they receive instruction, resources, and feedback; and (c) where other teachers and principals are supportive of their efforts (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) described the ideal associate teacher as one who “offers modelling, co-planning, frequent feedback, repeated opportunities to practice, and reflection upon practice while the student teacher gradually takes on more responsibility” (p. 409). How associate teachers

provide this guidance, however, is not clear. Associate teachers are not prepared consistently in how to provide constructive feedback, nor are they informed about effective mentor models and personal support methods. Thus, while the literature is rich with description of the role of the associate teacher, data are lacking to support how specific associates effectively enact these practices.

Role of the Teacher Candidate

Research in teacher education is not concerned with whether or not to prepare teacher candidates, but rather, what preparations lead to capable, competent teachers (Houston, 2008). While a majority of principals and faculty members rate new teachers as fairly well prepared to teach (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), research in teacher education suggests that teacher candidates are unable to cover all of the material expected of them (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Kosnik and Beck (2009) observe that while teachers encourage students to think critically and question presented material, teacher education fails to prepare teacher candidates to exercise these skills. Field experiences are similarly challenging, as teacher candidates struggle to play the part of both student and teacher in a classroom that is not their own (Falkenberg, 2010; Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). As Nielsen et al. (2010) report, teacher candidates “are here for observing but they don’t know what they are looking for or at” (p. 851). Further, Crocker and Dibbon note that Ontario’s teacher education programs have inconsistent admission standards, suggesting an inconsistent view of what preparations would lead to competent teachers. Speaking of the United States, Levine (2006) contends that teacher education programs “have worsened the situation by using teacher education as a cash cow – forcing their programs to enrol more students than was desirable, [and] lowering

admission standards” (p. 22). These challenges further complicate teacher candidates’ successful integration into their roles as beginning teachers in the field experience.

Field experiences magnify the influence of associate teacher practices on the practices of their teacher candidates (Clift & Brady, 2005). As Rideout and Koot (2009) caution, teacher candidates should not enter the practicum seeking educational panaceas. Instead, field experiences should engage teacher candidates as emerging teachers capable of making professional decisions about their teaching (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Schulz, 2005). Such opportunities are reduced when teacher candidates are limited to replicating associate teachers’ practices (Falkenberg, 2010; Volante & Earl, 2002). A teacher candidate in Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates’ (2010) study observed that:

There are pressures of always knowing that you're being evaluated, and sure, I can try whatever I want, but if I fall flat on my face and I'm not able to recover, well, it's going to reflect in the assessment. (p. 97)

Teacher candidates therefore face conflicting pressures from associate teachers and faculty supervisors that may not align with their own views of teaching (Bullock & Russell, 2010; Clift & Brady, 2005). Recognizing these pressures, the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2006) encourages associate teachers to collaborate with teacher candidates in an effort to foster candidates’ abilities. Such experiences provide teacher candidates with a clearer understanding of the profession and prepare them to effect change in students’ learning (Schulz, 2005).

To better prepare teacher candidates for success in their practicum placements, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) suggest encouraging teacher candidates to construct their own meanings in the profession. Teacher candidates’ frames and experiences affect how

they interpret the information they receive in teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). In their description of “teacher expertise,” Bransford, Derry, et al. (2005) note that teacher candidates should be engaged as developing professionals (p. 76). Explicitly encouraging teacher candidates to make professional choices reflects the reality of their pending role as classroom teachers and recognizes the validity of their past experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). Kosnik and Beck (2006) propose a similar approach through their constructivist lens. For Kosnik and Beck (2006), “knowledge is constructed by learners” (p. 10), arguing that teacher candidates’ knowledge is rooted in their experiences in teacher education programs. This links directly with the notion of interpretive research as “at its core, a search for local meanings” (Borko et al., 2008, p. 1025). In effect, teacher expertise and the constructivist lens validate candidates’ experiences and draw on them to create new understandings of effective teacher education. Framing teacher candidates as developing experts who co-construct their knowledge acknowledges candidates’ roles as meaning makers within the profession (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2006). Rather than prescribing the minutia of effective teaching, these lenses encourage teacher candidates to contribute to the development of knowledge within group contexts (Kosnik & Beck, 2006, 2009). This perspective supports the goals of teacher education, in that candidates are exposed to a culture that is “meaningful, critical, social, [and] holistic” (Kosnik & Beck, 2006, p. 2). Constructivist teacher education aims to integrate candidates into collaborative communities, where associate teachers and candidates co-plan throughout the field experience (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Kosnik and Beck (2006) suggest that in addition to preparing teachers more effectively, applying the constructivist perspective to teacher education programs would improve the reputation of

teaching as a profession. While constructive and interpretive lenses are themselves contested (Kosnik & Beck, 2006), these lenses lend themselves to a unique interpretation of the role of the teacher candidate, and offer insights into how teacher educators might respond to the current challenges of the profession.

Summary of the Chapter

The concepts described in this chapter have explored the existing research in teacher education as it relates to teacher candidates' experiences with their associate teachers. These experiences are central to Canadian teacher education programs and to candidates' preparedness to enter the profession (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Schulz, 2005). While teacher education faces a variety of challenges (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008), research in the field attempts to develop our understanding of effective practices and strategies (Kosnik & Beck, 2009). These strategies include those modelled by associate teachers in their classrooms (Falkenberg, 2010), as well as those that may best support teacher candidates in their transition into the profession (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Indeed, the relationship between associate teachers and their teacher candidates is particularly important to teacher candidates' success (Broad & Tessaro, 2010). Given the challenges and complexities of this relationship (Goodwin & Oyler, 2008; Hudson, 2013), however, research in this field is understandably incomplete. Thus, I aim to contribute to a growing understanding of how field experiences can best prepare teacher candidates to develop as professionals by means of their relationships with their associate teachers. The following chapter describes the methods used in this study in its effort to further refine our understanding of the associate-candidate relationship and its various elements.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This instrumental multicase study includes a qualitative focus group and semistructured interviews to better understand the nature of the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. The relationships between teacher candidates and associate teachers are both unique and universal: all teacher candidates undergo field experiences and therefore have associate teachers (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), and yet not all of these relationships are equally effective for preparing exemplary teachers. In this study, I explore the nature of this phenomenon through an examination of participants' relationships with their associate teachers (Titchen & Hobson, 2005). Accordingly, this chapter describes the methodology and design, selection of site and participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, methodological assumptions, limitations, credibility, and ethical considerations utilized during the course of the study.

Research Methodology and Design

As Toma (2006) describes, qualitative studies gather data from participants whose voices are valued and whose understandings can contribute multiple perspectives that help explain how or why a phenomenon occurs. Indeed, participants' voices are key to qualitative research in teacher education (Borko et al., 2008; Huling, 2006a). As Richardson (1997) notes, "individuals create their own understandings, based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe, and the phenomena or ideas with which they come in contact" (p. 3). The importance of participants' perspectives necessitates a focus on gathering rich, descriptive data so that participants' understandings can be described explicitly (Wolcott, 1994). In this way, the use of qualitative methods allowed me to examine the associate-candidate relationship and its complexities in detail (Tisher & Wideen, 1990).

This is an instrumental multicase study intended to gather rich data from participants on the associate-candidate relationship (Heck, 2006; Stake, 2006). Through this study I explore the common experience of the associate-candidate relationship as perceived by individual teacher candidates. This reflects Smits' (2010) position that "we ought to take very seriously . . . the lived experiences of field experiences for all involved" (p. 53) and draws on past studies exploring novice teachers' perceptions of their experiences (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Wood & Waarich-Fishman, 2006). Indeed, case studies are directly concerned with understanding the individual meanings as described by participants (Stark & Torrence, 2005). Moreover, this design reflects the interpretive lenses outlined in Chapter One. As Stark and Torrence (2005) note, "[case study] is very much within the 'social constructivist' perspective of social science" (p. 33). I approached the associate-candidate relationship through the lens of participants' experiences with each of their associate teachers, namely, the study's cases. These 13 relationships represent the "quintain" which form the collection of cases as described by Stake (2006, p. vi). This multicase design draws on each participants' experiences to contribute to a fuller understanding of the associate-candidate relationship as a whole (Stake, 2006). While cases are sometimes compared and contrasted, the study's main focus is toward understanding the development of exemplary relationships between teacher candidates and their associate teachers (Stark & Torrence, 2005). Thus, this study is instrumental in nature, reflecting Stake's (2006) position that instrumental case studies have interests beyond the cases themselves. I seek to understand the 13 case relationships collectively, and through these relationships contribute to a better understanding of the associate-candidate relationship and its successful implementation in the field experience.

This study includes both a focus group and semistructured interviews as described by Heck (2006). These interview structures sought teacher candidates' perspectives on their teacher education experiences (Volante, 2006), particularly their relationships with their associate teachers. Focus groups in particular are represented in teacher education literature as a tool for gathering rich data from participants in group discussions (Broad & Tessaro, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Volante & Earl, 2002). Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) note that focus groups complement the data gathered in individual interviews and enrich the depth and variety of participants' responses. Moreover, the interactive nature of focus groups changes the context of participants' engagement, allowing participants to develop new understandings of the topics discussed during the study (Lemisko & Ward, 2010; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Krueger and Casey (2009) contend that "a group possesses the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts, to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone don't possess" (p. 19). Participants who attended both the focus group and the interview phase of the research were therefore able to contribute their perspectives individually and through group discussions, offering more insights and enhancing the breadth of data available for analysis (Krueger, 1998a).

The focus group phase was included in the study's methodology to learn how participants perceive their relationships with associate teachers, and how the participants themselves compared and contrasted their various experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009). As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) note, this inquiry structure "mitigate[s] . . . the authority of the researcher, allowing participants to 'take over' or 'own' the interview space" (p. 40). As Krueger (1998b) notes, the researcher takes on the role of a moderator, facilitating the discussion to ensure all voices are heard, that the discussion flows between the participants

themselves, and that research questions enhance the discussion rather than disrupt it. This includes a consideration of dominant voices and collective thinking. As Krueger (1998a) questions, “who is influenced by whom, and what is the result” (p. 20)? Thus, during the focus group phase, I served as the discussion moderator and facilitated participants’ conversations with an emphasis on hearing from all participants in meaningful ways. Throughout, inter-participant discussion was central to the focus group, and participants were encouraged to share their experiences with one another rather than with me in the role of researcher (Krueger, 1998b).

Following the focus group phase, which was conducted in May 2014, a semistructured interview was conducted with each participant. These interviews took place between May and August 2014. The interview phase was selected for the methodology based on past precedents in teacher education literature (Flores, 2006) and so that new insights arising from the focus group could be discussed with each participant (Krueger, 1998a). When scheduling conflicts prevented some participants from attending the focus group phase, such participants were invited to participate in individual interviews that explored both their individual experiences and their perception of thoughts arising from the focus group. The following section therefore describes how the participants were recruited and which phases of the study each participant was involved in.

Selection of Site and Participants

In this study, I explored the associate-candidate relationship as described by teacher candidates who have just completed their final practicum placement in a teacher education program. Participants were selected from a single teacher education program at a mid-sized Canadian university in Ontario (Creswell, 2014). As Crocker and Dibbon (2008) note,

“programs . . . differ markedly in structure and duration” (p. ix). These structural differences influence the nuances of candidates’ field experiences and produce a variety of conflicting results (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Falkenberg, 2010; Resta, 2006). Participants were therefore selected from only one faculty. The selected faculty offers a number of teacher education programs with varying field experience structures. To further ensure participant homogeneity for the focus group phase (Krueger & Casey, 2009), participants were sought from only one of the institution’s teacher education programs. That is, by selecting participants from a common teacher education program, participants were able to refer to somewhat consistent coursework experiences, field experience lengths, and student age ranges from their teaching experiences.

Teacher candidates are uniquely positioned to describe the enactment and effectiveness of associate teacher practices (Huling, 2006b). Candidates’ perceptions of these experiences vary significantly from the perceptions of faculty members, associates, and expert teachers (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Moreover, teacher candidates’ perspectives are often overlooked in favour of insights from such teacher educators (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Hudson, 2013). As Zeichner (2010) notes, “the people teaching the campus courses often know very little about the specific practices used in the P-12 classrooms where their students are placed” (p. 484), limiting their ability to describe the experiences of their teacher candidates (Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). Similarly, while associate teachers are an essential part of teacher candidates’ field experiences, they are not necessarily prepared or able to step outside of their role within the practicum (Nielsen et al., 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994; Zeichner, 2010). Thus, this study’s participants are exclusively teacher candidates. This

reflects a growing tendency in the literature to draw on the knowledge and experience of student teachers (Foster et al., 2010; Volante, 2006; Zeichner, 2010).

Participants took part in the study after they had completed their final field experience. All participants had experienced at least two contexts for their field experiences, which enhanced participants' understanding of the practicum, their role as a teacher candidate, and their relationships with different associate teachers (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, et al., 2005; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Teacher candidates who have just completed their final field experience interpret their recent experiences in a unique way as compared to novice candidates or experienced teachers. Falkenberg (2010) explains that this provides candidates with "an authority of experience" to reflect on their experiences and question the assumptions made during prior experiences (p. 6). The recency of participants' experiences follows a similar chronology used by Volante (2002), in that teacher candidates were interviewed soon after their completion of a teacher education program. Further, as Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates (2010) note, this recency enables participants to recall their field experiences before their reflections become distanced and nonspecific.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants were selected using convenience sampling (Wolcott, 1994). I approached the university's faculty of education to send a letter of invitation via email to potential participants enrolled in the selected program. The letter described the purpose of the study, the process involved, the voluntary nature of the study, and invited participants to contact me via email if they wished to participate. This letter of invitation was sent to potential

participants three times between March and May of 2014. Only those teacher candidates who chose to respond to these invitations were included in the study.

Eight teacher candidates responded to the letter of invitation and were invited to provide their availability to participate in the focus group stage of the research. One respondent chose to withdraw from the study during this scheduling process. Two other respondents did not participate in the study and were therefore not included. These candidates' contact data were deleted and they were removed from the list of participants. The remaining five participants agreed to a date and time for the focus group. The day before the focus group, two participants informed me that they would be unable to attend the focus group. Thus, three participants attended and participated in the focus group stage of the research as well as in individual follow-up interviews. These three participants signed consent forms and statements of confidentiality before the focus group began. The two participants who had been unable to attend the focus group participated in a modified individual interview, comprised of questions drawn from the focus group and follow-up interview protocols. These participants provided written consent but were not required to sign a statement of confidentiality, as they were not present at the focus group. Thus, five teacher candidates participated in the study, with three of these candidates participating in both the focus group and interview phases of the research. Participants experienced a total of 13 associate-candidate relationships across their experiences, contributing the 13 cases of interest in the study. These participants and their 13 case relationships are explored in the following section.

Portrait of Participants

This instrumental multicase study draws on the experiences of five participating teacher candidates. The quintain, or group of cases, includes 13 pairs of relationships between participating teacher candidates and their associate teachers (Stake, 2006). Each participant experienced two or three relationships, with each relationship lasting between 3 weeks and 4 months. The participants and the cases they experienced are described in the following sections, organized alphabetically by participant pseudonym. Associate teachers have also been given pseudonyms, matched with their teacher candidates. Table 1 provides a summary of the relationships explored in further detail below:

Dana. Dana is in her final year of the concurrent education program. A Junior/Intermediate candidate, Dana has been in the program for 6 years rather than the traditional 5. I first met Dana several years ago, and we have worked together in a number of contexts. She is an energetic young woman who seems relieved to be completing her degree. As Dana shares a number of times during our conversation, she has had a challenging year. Dana participated in the modified individual interview after being unable to attend the focus group stage of the study. She experienced relationships with three different associate teachers, all in the Upper Heights District School Board (pseudonym). Dana's first two relationships—with Mrs. Davis and Ms. Dixon—both occurred during the fall semester. After spending several weeks in Mrs. Davis' classroom, Dana requested to be removed from the practicum and placed with an alternative associate teacher. Dana's reflections on this relationship are generally negative, owing in part to a frank conversation at the end of their relationship. Dana's second relationship, with Ms. Dixon, began on a comparatively positive note in the middle of the first practicum. By the end of the placement, however, Dana

Table 1

Teacher Candidates' Perceptions of Their Relationships with Their Associate Teachers

	<u>First Associate Teacher</u>		<u>Second Associate Teacher</u>		<u>Third Associate Teacher</u>	
	<u>Name</u>	<u>+, -, or ~^a</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>+, -, or ~</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>+, -, or ~</u>
Dana	Mrs. Davis	-	Ms. Dixon	-	Mr. Doherty	+
Ellen	Ms. Edwards	+	Mr. Evans	~ (-)	n/a	n/a
Gail	Mrs. Gray	-	Ms. Green	+	Mr. Garcia	+(~)
Linda	Ms. Lewis	-	Mrs. Lee	+	n/a	n/a
Sarah	Ms. Sanders	+	Mr. Scott	+	Mr. Sullivan	+(~)

^a Denotes a teacher candidate's perception of a positive, negative, or mixed experience with their associate teacher. Where two symbols appear, the symbol in brackets (~) denotes my perception based on the participant's comments.

experienced similar challenges and described the experience as negative. Dana was given an extra week of preparation ahead of her third experience, which took place during the program's second practicum period in the spring. Her third associate teacher, Mr. Doherty, is the only associate she describes in a positive light. Dana felt supported and encouraged during this field experience, and as such reflects with a markedly different tone than when recalling her first two placements.

Ellen. Like Dana, Ellen is in her final year of concurrent education within the Junior/Intermediate stream. Forever the optimist, many of Ellen's reflections are positive or, when negative, draw on perspectives other than her own to mitigate her response. Alongside Dana, Ellen is the second of two participants to participate in the modified individual interview, as she was not involved in the study during the focus group phase of the research. Of note, Ellen is the only participant who acquired additional teaching experience after completing her practicum placements. Ellen taught internationally after completing the program and touched on the experience briefly at the beginning of her interview. Interestingly, Ellen tends not to refer to this additional experience unless discussing non-practicum elements of the program (namely, coursework). As a teacher candidate, Ellen experienced two relationships within the River Valley District School Board (pseudonym). Her first, with Ms. Edwards, mirrors the program's fall term structure and as such lasted as long as both of Dana's first two relationships. Ellen's comments about this relationship are mostly positive, and she notes that the relationship continued throughout her time in teacher education. While Ellen admits she did not learn much pedagogy from Ms. Edwards, she seems to view her associate as an ongoing mentor in the profession. Ellen's second relationship was with Mr. Evans, again following the standard structure during the spring

term. Ellen references a number of challenging personal and professional interactions in this relationship. She does, however, acknowledge Mr. Evans taught her in a number of ways, and commended his willingness to help her move forward in the profession. As many of Ellen's comments about Mr. Evans are negative, however, I have noted the negative aspects of her experience in Table 1.

Gail. Gail is also a fifth year concurrent education student, though she follows the Primary/Junior stream of the teacher education program. Along with Ellen and Dana, she is the third of three participants who I know outside of the research project, as we worked together for a number of years. Gail is cheerful and quick to answer, particularly during her individual interview. She participated in both the focus group and individual interview stages of the study. Gail experienced relationships with three associate teachers. Two of these relationships took place in the River Valley District School Board. The first, with Mrs. Gray, matches Ellen's placement with Ms. Edwards. Gail considers this to be a negative experience and tends not to describe the relationship unless prompted. Instead, Gail focuses her reflection almost exclusively on her second relationship. Gail describes her time with Ms. Green as a highly positive experience and often referred to Ms. Green as "my associate" without mentioning the first or third. Gail's second field experience finished 3 weeks earlier than the program's typical end date so that she could participate in a third placement. This third field experience, at the Lakeway District School Board (pseudonym), ran until the end of the program. Gail reflects positively on her relationship with her third associate, Mr. Garcia, though she often does not refer directly to the experience when talking about her experiences as a whole. I have noted the experience as mixed based on the shorter duration of

the relationship, Gail's tendency not to discuss Mr. Garcia, and her admission that their interactions tended not to include in-depth feedback or guidance.

Linda. Linda is a mature student who, like Gail, participated in the Primary/Junior stream of the teacher education program. She is the only consecutive education student included in the study and is also the only participant who has pursued higher education outside of the teacher education program. Indeed, Linda describes herself as a researcher and is often thoughtful in her responses. Linda participated in both the focus group and individual interview stages of the study. Like Ellen, both of Linda's two relationships followed the standard structure for placements at the site of study. Linda's reflections on her first relationship with Ms. Lewis are similar to Gail's experiences with Mrs. Gray, and thus are almost exclusively negative. Linda does, however, offer further reflection in her individual interview suggesting she considered her time with Ms. Lewis between the focus group and her interview. Linda is the only participant who had met an associate teacher outside of the field experience. She knew Mrs. Lee, her second associate teacher, before the second placement began. Linda reflects positively on that experience, noting that her second field experience alleviated many of the concerns she developed during her first placement.

Sarah. Sarah is a fifth year concurrent education student within the Junior/Intermediate stream. Coffee in hand, Sarah participated in both the focus group and individual interview stages of the study. She is the only participant who experienced a relationship with an associate teacher in an international context: while two of Sarah's relationships took place in the River Valley District School Board, her third practicum occurred in Europe. Her three practica span the same length as Gail's, with the first lasting the standard period and the final two splitting the second term's structure. Sarah is unique in

being the only participant to reflect positively on all three of her relationships. Her first relationship, with Ms. Sanders, involved ongoing support, feedback, and guidance. Sarah reflects positively on this early intervention in her teaching. Sarah's second field experience with Mr. Scott varied considerably from the first. Sarah does, however, praise Mr. Scott's less structured approach and considers the experience to have been a success. Sarah's third relationship, with Mr. Sullivan, was particularly brief. Sarah mentions only teaching for 8 days during this practicum. Since Sarah tends not to recall this relationship unless prompted, I have denoted the experience as mixed in the summary in Table 1.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were designed to facilitate the data collection of teacher candidates' perceptions of their relationships with their associate teachers. A focus group protocol and a semistructured interview were used for candidates who participated in both the focus group and follow-up interview. A modified semistructured interview was used for candidates who were unable to attend the focus group. In addition to the focus group and interview protocols, researcher field notes were collected (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The instruments, field notes, and their usage are described in the following sections.

Focus Group Protocol

The focus group protocol (see Appendix A) includes 10 semistructured questions designed to incite conversation between the participants about different aspects of the field experience and the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. Questions for the focus group were developed after the preliminary literature review and with reference to research questions of studies in teacher education (Dangel, 2006). Further,

questions were designed to address the research questions explored in this study. Participants were asked to describe their experiences with their associate teachers and their perceptions of their relationships during their field experiences. Participants were asked to describe their experiences with feedback, guidance, and support, and to consider how each of their associate teachers approached the associate-candidate relationship.

Following the focus group model described by Krueger and Casey (2009), questions were designed to facilitate discussion between participants. The 10 guiding questions were open-ended and worded in participants' language to encourage self-disclosure among participants. For example, question 4 asks, "how did your associate teachers provide feedback on how you were doing" (Appendix A). In their responses to this question, participants shared their experiences with one another and attempted to uncover the similarities and differences between their experiences. This is consistent with Krueger's (1998a) contention that focus group participants are able to learn from one another during the data collection process.

The protocol also includes a variety of follow-up questions for each guiding question that could be explored based on participants' initial responses. Guiding questions were open-ended and semistructured in nature (Hatch, 2002), and were adjusted during the focus group to explore participants' responses in greater depth (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). For example, in response to question 2, which asks participants to share their experiences in the teacher education as a whole, one participant mentioned that the experience was "stressful." To explore this unanticipated theme, a new guiding question emerged: "Could you explain what you mean by that?" Further, when only some participants responded to a question, I encouraged other participants to offer their thoughts. As Krueger (1998b) notes, such

adjustments reflect the semistructured nature of the focus group and the importance of responding to new insights as they appear during the conversation.

In a similar vein, all participants were invited to respond to the introduction question in order to establish comfort and trust between myself and the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009). I also offered an answer to this initial question, following Krueger's (1998b) recommendation that focus group moderators share demographic details about themselves to establish rapport within the group. Questions 4-8 served as key questions for the focus group, again following Krueger and Casey's model. Questions 2-3 served as transition questions while questions 9-10 brought closure to the group, allowing participants to speak both to the specific topic of the focus group as well as otherwise unaddressed experiences they wished to introduce (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The order and wording of questions were selected to encourage participants to discuss specific elements of the associate-candidate relationship, particularly referencing specific contexts arising from teacher education literature (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

Semistructured Follow-Up Interview

The follow-up interview protocol (see Appendix B) was similarly developed using a semistructured, qualitative approach (Heck, 2006). Nine questions were included to further explore individual participants' lived experiences and their relationships with specific associate teachers. Participants were asked to further describe their particular perceptions of the associate-candidate relationship, especially as to how each of their associate teachers enacted concepts like feedback, guidance, and support. Participants were also asked about their own role in forming these relationships and about their perception of the impact of these relationships on their field experiences. As with the focus group protocol, guiding questions

included subsequent follow-up questions to prompt further discussion. The order and precise wording of questions were adjusted to reflect each interview's contexts, and to ensure the language used reflected participants' own responses (Creswell, 2014; Krueger & Casey, 2009). This semistructured approach allowed me to develop rapport with participants and probe for further detail when participants offered unexpected responses (Bean, 2006; Heck, 2006). Question 1 solicits demographic information from participants in lieu of a registration form. As Krueger (1998b) notes, such background information can be useful during data analysis if specific participants articulate common or conflicting views. Questions 1-6 and 8-9 were developed in advance of data collection. Question 7, which draws on responses arising during the focus group, was developed after the initial focus group based on my initial observations and analysis. This reflects the emergent nature of qualitative research and allowed me to investigate data points that would have otherwise remained unexplored (Hatch, 2002; Krueger, 1998b).

Modified Semistructured Interview

Two participants were unable to attend the initial focus group and therefore had not contributed to the data gathered using the focus group protocol. In order to capture these participants' experiences, a third protocol was developed (see Appendix C). The modified interview protocol follows the same semistructured approach to facilitate participants' discussion of their individual lived experiences (Heck, 2006). The protocol includes 12 guiding questions, with five questions drawn from the focus group protocol (2-7) and five questions from the follow-up interview protocol (1, 3-6). This protocol also included a modified Question 7 from the follow-up interview, adjusted to reflect that these participants were not present for the focus group phase. The closing question is common between both of

the previous protocols. This group of questions was designed to provide these participants with the opportunity to describe their experiences in a similar manner to the participants who attended the focus group and semistructured interview phases of the study.

Researcher Field Notes

Researcher field notes were collected throughout the focus group and interview process (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Field notes included observations of participants' body language, eye contact, tone, pauses, and silence. As Krueger (1998a) notes, "silence does not imply a lack of opinion. Lack of comment on a particular topic may itself have meaning in analysis" (p. 20). Further, field notes were used to record emerging themes, participant dynamics, as well as participants' responses to ideas raised in the group (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Thus, field notes included both descriptive and reflective notes relating to participants' responses and interactions during both the focus group and their individual interviews. These field notes were helpful in guiding the semistructured discussions inherent to this study, particularly as a way of noting key themes raised by participants. As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis contend, using field notes to guide subsequent discussion enhances participants' responses to ideas that emerge during the data collection process. This process is described further in the following section.

Data Collection and Recording

Multiple sources of qualitative data were collected for this study. The focus group and follow-up interviews/modified interviews were used to gather data relating to participants' experiences of the associate-candidate relationship. The focus group and all interviews were audio recorded, and field notes were used to document participant responses (Borko et al.,

2008). In the following sections, I discuss the data collection process of the focus group, the follow-up interviews, and the modified interviews as used in this study.

Focus Group

A single focus group formed the first phase of the data collection process. Initially, I intended to conduct two focus groups of eight participants each, as described by Krueger and Casey (2009). Focus groups are most effective when they include five to eight participants and when more than one group is conducted, as this allows for analysis of patterns between the various groups (Krueger & Casey, 2009). As Krueger and Casey note, resource limitations sometimes necessitate that fewer, smaller focus groups be conducted. This was the case with this study. As only eight participants responded to the letter of invitation, the second focus group was not conducted and the participants were invited to a single focus group. The number of actual participants in both the focus group and the subsequent interview phases is consistent with the typical number of participants in case studies (Creswell, 2014). Due to the lack of subsequent focus groups, however, this study does not attempt to discern patterns between separate participant groups (Krueger, 1998a), and instead focuses its analysis on individual cases and patterns between those cases (Heck, 2006).

Focus groups bring together participants with common experiences so that they may describe their perceptions of those events (Krueger & Casey, 2009). As Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2013) describe, focus groups create “safe spaces for interaction and self-disclosure” (p. 64), allowing participants to provide depth and detail in their responses (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The focus group solicited participants’ experiences and perceptions of the relationship between themselves and their associate teachers. Three of the five participants were able to attend the scheduled focus group. The focus group followed the

protocol described earlier in this chapter, using a semistructured approach. This approach enabled me to adjust the sequence and amount of time dedicated to each question based on participants' responses (Krueger 1998b). Participants' responses were paraphrased for understanding (Broad & Tessaro, 2010), and participants were encouraged to discuss experiences with one another and explore both commonalities and differences between their field experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Participants often initiated discussion of a topic before the related question was posed, allowing the participants' voices to guide the conversation while still being supported by the focus group protocol (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This is consistent with Krueger's (1998b) recommendation that focus group questions flow spontaneously in response to participants' engagement with the area of study. The focus group lasted 1 hour and 15 minutes. During the participants' discussions, I recorded field notes relating to key themes that began to emerge from the discussion, and noted areas of interest that could be returned to in subsequent follow-up interviews (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013).

Follow-Up Interviews

The three participants who attended the focus group were invited to attend individual follow-up interviews of approximately 1 hour (Creswell, 2014). These interviews were included to enhance the data collected in the focus group (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013), with a focus on exploring themes arising from the focus group data. These interviews clarified participants' responses, allowed participants to return to topics of discussion that the focus group shifted away from, and provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on their responses between the focus group and their individual interview. Interviews were between 45 and 65 minutes each, and occurred within 3 weeks of the initial focus group.

Modified Interviews

The two participants who did not attend the focus group were invited to attend modified individual interviews of approximately 1 hour (Creswell, 2014). As described in the instrumentation section, these interviews were designed to gather participants' responses in lieu of their absence from the focus group. The two interviews were each 70 minutes long and occurred 4 and 7 weeks after the final follow-up interview, respectively.

Data Processing and Analysis

Throughout the study, data analysis followed an emergent structure. As Toma (2006) and Borko et al. (2008) note, this process of qualitative analysis occurs concurrently with the data collection process. Analysis began following the focus group phase, as the initial themes arising from the focus group were used to frame follow-up questions for specific individual interviews. Heck (2006) notes that, in interpretive research, themes and patterns continue to evolve as the data collection and analysis proceed. As Heck (2006) describes, "this process involves refining the emerging categories and their properties" so that clearer comparisons may be made across the cases (p. 382). Axial coding (Krueger 1998a) and constant comparative analysis (Flores, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2009) were therefore used throughout the analysis process, so that participants' relationships could be compared with other cases in the data. As Krueger (1998a) describes, axial coding attaches labels to specific elements of the phenomenon under investigation, with labels (codes) being used to explore combinations of elements in the associate-candidate relationship. Constant comparison, similarly, identifies patterns between participants' experiences, such that separate cases can be compared and contrasted with one another when analyzing a particular code (Flores, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2009). Constant comparative analysis also appears in previous studies involving

teacher candidate participants (Volante, 2006). As Krueger (1998a) notes, this analysis process also allows participants' responses to be compared with "established theory in social science" (p. 14), that is, teacher education literature. To assist with the organization and analysis process, a qualitative analysis program (NVivo) was used during coding and data analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Analysis of the data from the study addresses the study's primary question: From the perspective of teacher candidates, what makes an effective associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship? This question necessitates an interpretive perspective as described by Krueger (1998a). Interpretive research involves complex analysis of data, extending from simple description to attempt to understand the essence of the experience under investigation (Krueger, 1998a). Indeed, as Borko et al. (2008) note, "interpretive research is, at its core, a search for local meanings" (p. 1025). Interpretive analysis reflects the interpretive lens of the study and is drawn from existing research in teacher education (Borko et al., 2008; Huling, 2006a).

The study's subsequent research questions were also explored using the interpretive lens. The first research question: How do teacher candidates perceive the associate-candidate relationship (as well as its subquestions)? was identified by participants' discussions during the focus group and individual interviews. These responses reflect Borko et al.'s (2008) note that interpretive research "[preserves data's] complexity [by] communicating the perspectives of the actual participants" (p. 1025). The second research question: How can associate teachers support candidates' needs in a way that is consistent with program visions and professional standards? arose from a comparison of the participants' insights across the focus group and interviews. Comparisons were also made to the existing literature on

effective teacher education practices (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Kosnik & Beck, 2009). The third research question: How do participants' experiences contribute to a developing understanding of effective teacher education? arose from participants' insights, and how these cases compare to the literature as explored in the second research question. While the data analysis process is interpretive in nature, the participants' voices and shared experiences form the core of the data and are considered primary sources.

In addition to the verbal responses provided by participants, data analysis also involved an investigation of the transcripts. Group dynamics in the focus group and nonverbal responses, such as silence, "mhms," and body language, were considered when exploring related data points (Krueger 1998a). Participants' responses were similarly analyzed for intensity of response, extensiveness across participants, and frequency of occurrence (Krueger, 1998a). This analysis of intensity, extent, and frequency was valuable for identifying which insights were unique to individual participants and which concepts occurred across both the focus group and interview phases, including among participants who had not participated in the focus group. At times, internal consistency was explored both in focus group data and between participants' data, as some participants chose to change their response as the study progressed (Krueger, 1998a). As Krueger (1998b) describes, these unanticipated nuances were valuable to the data analysis process.

Methodological Assumptions

Qualitative research depends on a number of methodological assumptions. This study's methodology is rooted in the belief that teacher quality depends upon the quality of teacher education programs and the field experiences of those programs (Smits, 2010; Tisher

& Wideen, 1990). As the OECD (2005) report notes, “teacher quality is the single most important school variable influencing student achievement” (p. 2). Moreover, in this study, I focus my attention on the substance of the field experience, rather than its structure, as noted by Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005). Further, the methodology was designed to build upon existing teacher education literature, particularly Broad and Tessaro’s (2010) assertion that “the role of [the] associate teacher is poorly defined and . . . often expectations are ambiguous and overlapping” (p. 80). The instruments used in this study are similarly rooted in the belief that teacher candidates’ experiences are largely shaped by the field experience and by their associate teacher in particular (Dillon & O-Connor, 2010; McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008).

Participants are assumed to have been honest in their responses and to have provided accurate responses during both the focus group and their individual interviews. Similarly, I assume that participants are able to recall relevant experiences of their relationships with their associate teachers. Participants were asked to recall experiences occurring between 6 weeks and 9 months in the past, which may impact participants’ ability to respond to questions included in the research. The methodology also assumes that all potential participants were made aware of the study during the recruitment phase of the study.

Limitations

Qualitative research requires an acknowledgement of the scope and limitations of the study and its chosen methodology (Creswell, 2014). Indeed, as Bean (2006) contends, design and methodology themselves affect what insights a study might uncover. This instrumental multicase is intended to explore specific meanings as they are constructed by participants, and is not designed to generalize to all teacher education programs (Cochran-Smith &

Zeichner, 2005). As Borko et al. (2008) caution, interpretive research does not always rely on the same conceptual framework. Thus, the reader should consider their own contexts when comparing this study to their own experiences, or to other studies that do not use a constructivist (interpretive) approach (Kosnik & Beck, 2006). Qualitative research does not attempt to generalize, and rather aims to describe the meanings participants ascribe to their lived experiences in a given context (Hatch, 2002).

Participants' data were gathered from less than 3 hours of direct data collection per participant in an effort to "balance the need for in-depth data with the practical reality that data requests can become overly burdensome to study participants" (Huling, 2006a, p. 4). This study, further, includes participants from a single teacher education program. Other teacher education programs structure their field experiences differently (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008), and, as such, the nature of the associate-candidate relationship may be different in these contexts. Further, as a graduate of a teacher education program, I acknowledge that I am informed by my own associate-candidate relationships as described in Chapter One. As I have not served as an associate teacher, I also acknowledge that I am an outsider to the perspectives of associate teachers.

This study does not explore associate teachers' perceptions of the associate-candidate relationship, or the perceptions of other stakeholders in teacher education. Thus, while I aim to voice the constructed understandings of the participating teacher candidates, I acknowledge that other stakeholders would offer different perceptions and understandings. Similarly, in the absence of their associate teacher, participants may have attempted "to present themselves in a favourable light" (Hobson et al., 2009, p. 213). This limitation was considered when designing the study's instrumentation and questions were framed in

multiple ways to minimize this tendency (Krueger & Casey, 2009). For example, when questions sought both positive and negative perspectives, I asked participants for positive examples first (see Appendix A, question 3). This encouraged participants to focus on effective associate teacher strategies rather than comparing themselves with their associate teachers. Similarly, by asking participants what they might change about their relationships with their associate teachers (see Appendix B, question 6), I hoped to encourage participants to reflect on unsuccessful experiences that they might not otherwise discuss. Given the absent associate teacher perspectives, future research into associate teachers' perception of this topic would be valuable, as would an exploration of specific associate-candidate pairings as they enact these relationships.

As a graduate-level thesis, this study is limited in time and extent. The selected convenience sampling includes only those candidates within a single teacher education program who chose to respond to the letter of invitation. The study does not include the ideal number of focus groups as described by Krueger and Casey (2009). As Krueger (1998a) notes, "one of the dangers of single focus groups is the lack of comparison and the inability to discern patterns [between other focus groups]" (p. 17). To mitigate this limitation, additional participants were included in the study by means of the modified interview after the focus group occurred. Sample size, however, remains a limitation for the study's generalizability. This study would have been more generalizable if the intended sample size (two focus groups of eight participants each) had been achieved, and would have offered a richer data set by including more candidates' experiences. Thus, reflecting Stake's (1995) contention that case studies are not meant to generalize to all people in all contexts, I invite

readers to consider if the findings presented resonate with their experience of the associate-candidate relationship as it occurs in their contexts.

As a study including a focus group phase, some participants' responses may have been limited by dominant voices and collective thinking. While the role of the focus group moderator is to ensure all participants' voices are heard, some participants may have chosen to agree with dominant opinions or collective ideas during this stage of the study. Importantly, however, each of the participants in the focus group phase disagreed with another participant at least once during the study and offered a contrasting perspective. Such alternative views are included in Chapter Four, reflecting Krueger and Casey's (2009) contention that consensus should not be a goal in focus group research. Further, two of the five participants were not present for the focus group, and, in many cases, these participants echoed comments from the focus group despite not being present for the focus group conversations. The participants in the focus group were not friends and did not seem to know each other well. None of the participants were in the same cohort group, and while I knew some of the participants outside of the study, participants in the focus group did not seem to know each other well outside of the context of the research. Thus, while dominant voices remain a possible limitation, this study includes a number of factors intended to mitigate their impact on the findings presented in the following chapters.

Finally, participants were informed that due to the social nature of the focus group, there was a limit to the degree of confidentiality that could be enforced among participants in the focus group phase. As Volante (2006) describes, participants may choose to share what was discussed during the focus group with others after the study is completed. In an effort to address this concern, all participants who participated in this phase signed a statement of

confidentiality agreeing not to disclose such information. Participants were also informed that as the researcher, I could not prevent other participants from making such disclosures if they chose to do so.

Establishing Credibility

Data were collected with attention to maintaining the qualitative validity and reliability of participants' responses (Stark & Torrence, 2005; Toma, 2006). Field notes were recorded at each stage of the data collection process, documenting my observations of participant interactions, recurring comments, and points for further investigation. Further observations were recorded at the conclusion of each interview and during the transcription of the audio recordings. Following the transcription process, I conducted multiple member checks with all participants to ensure participants' voices were accurately reflected (Heck, 2006). During the first member check, participants were sent transcripts including researcher field notes. A subsequent member check included a draft of the study's findings organized by themes emerging from the data, as well as a copy of the portrait of participants included earlier in this chapter. Participants received a final member check that included a revised draft of the study's findings as well as its recommendations as outlined in Chapters Four and Five. Throughout this process, participants were invited to provide feedback and clarify transcripts, findings, and recommendations based on their experiences.

Collected data were triangulated to further clarify the data analysis process and enhance the data's validity. Participants' comments in the focus group were examined alongside their responses in their follow-up interviews as well as the modified interviews of the remaining participants (Toma, 2006). I conducted all interviews and focus group sessions to improve qualitative reliability across data sets. Participants sometimes shared responses

that contradicted existing teacher education literature or ran contrary to emerging themes in the study. Since consensus is not the goal in qualitative research (Krueger & Casey, 2009), these discrepancies have been included in the discussion and analysis of the data (Creswell, 2014). As Toma (2006) notes, “qualitative research assumes that many interpretations are possible and invites the reader to make his or her own interpretations” (p. 407). These contradictory responses have been included to allow readers to interpret the data as it relates to their contexts. Further, given the importance of participants’ voices in this study, the researchers’ protocols, questions, and individual field notes attempt to capture the “thick description” essential to qualitative data collection (Wolcott, 1994, p. 15).

To further enhance the quality of the collected data, corrective feedback was sought from my faculty supervisor and research committee (Krueger, 1998a). Peer debriefing (Creswell, 2014) with my faculty supervisor was used to ensure that the research would resonate beyond myself and the study’s participants.

Ethical Considerations

This study received ethics clearance and approval from the Brock University Research Ethics Board before participant recruitment and data collection began (file #13-208 KITCHEN). The following sections describe this study’s specific considerations of informed consent, participant withdrawal, and confidentiality (Creswell, 2014).

Informed Consent

I approached the selected university’s faculty of education to send a letter of invitation via email to potential participants enrolled in the chosen program. The opportunity to participate was extended to all teacher candidates in the program at each of the university’s campuses. The letter described the purpose of the study, the process involved,

the voluntary nature of the study, and invited participants to contact me via email if they wished to participate. Candidates were not emailed directly by anyone involved in the research unless they responded to these calls for participants. Participants were provided with a copy of the letter of consent and a consent form at either the focus group or during the modified individual interview if the participant was unable to attend the focus group. The consent form outlined the potential risks of participation, including senses of embarrassment, stress, or self-consciousness should the participant choose to share emotionally-sensitive topics; as well as the potential benefits of participation, including an opportunity to share and reflect on their experiences with their associate teachers. Participants were informed of on-campus counselling services offered to students at the university in case participants experienced adverse emotional effects while discussing their experiences. Participants were also provided with a \$5 gift certificate for every phase of the study that they completed (i.e., the focus group and interview) for a total value of up to \$10.

Participant Withdrawal

Participants had the right not to respond to any question or discussion point arising in the study, and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were informed that if they chose to withdraw from the study, any individual data (pseudonym, contact information, individual interview transcript) would be destroyed. Any focus group data collected up to the point of withdrawal would not be destroyed, since participants' data could not be effectively removed from the focus group transcript without undermining the context of the remaining focus group data. As Kosnik and Beck (2006) note, dynamics and participant interactions are central to the value of the data arising from these focus groups. Participants were informed, however, that should they choose to withdraw,

neither their individual experiences nor direct quotes of their contributions would be used. Participants were informed that it would not be possible to withdraw after the master list linking participant identities with pseudonyms had been destroyed upon completion of the study, as there would be no way to identify a particular individual's data. One of the initial respondents did choose to withdraw before the study began, while two other respondents did not respond to scheduling efforts. These individuals' data were destroyed as described above. None of the participants who signed the consent form or participated in the research phases withdrew from the study.

Confidentiality

The study included a number of protocols to maintain confidentiality for research participants, their associate teachers, and other individuals involved in the teacher education program (Toma, 2006). Data collected during the study were stored securely for the duration of the study. Only the research team, my supervisor and I, had access to this data.

Participants were assigned a pseudonym for their data. Participants' names, their associate teachers' names, and any identifying features from their field experiences were not included in the reporting of the data associated with the study. Further, all such identifying features were removed from the focus group and interview transcripts. To reduce the likelihood of participant reluctance to criticize the institution, participants were informed that their data would not be reviewed by my supervisor before pseudonyms had been applied. Similarly, after participants reviewed their transcripts during the member check process, focus group participants received new pseudonyms for their data.

The structure of focus groups necessarily provided participants with information about other participants in the study, as well as other participants' experiences and insights.

Thus, participants were asked to maintain confidentiality as part of their role in the focus group phase. Participants were asked not to share what was discussed in the focus group with others. Participants were also asked to avoid mentioning specific schools, associate teachers, or students they encountered during their practicum placements. To this effect, all participants in the focus group phase signed statements of confidentiality outlining their agreement to respect the confidentiality of fellow participants.

Summary of the Chapter

This instrumental multicase study was designed to examine the nature of the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. The study includes participants' own perceptions of this relationship in an effort to understand the effective elements of exemplary field experiences in this context. The methodology and design, selection of site and participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, methodological assumptions, limitations, credibility, and ethical considerations discussed in this chapter underpin the results of the study, which are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The relationship between associate teachers and teacher candidates is an important dimension of teacher education research (McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). While there has been much study of this relationship, there is still a limited understanding of how these relationships develop effectively (Broad & Tessaro, 2010). The purpose of this study is to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. The primary research question for this study was as follows: From the perspective of teacher candidates, what makes an effective associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship? I explored this question using three further research questions to explore various elements of the research focus: First, How do teacher candidates perceive the associate-candidate relationship? How can associate teachers support candidates' needs in a way that is consistent with program visions and professional standards? And finally, How do participants' experiences contribute to a developing understanding of effective teacher education?

As explored in the previous chapter, this instrumental multicase study includes experiences from five participating teacher candidates who collectively experienced relationships with 13 associate teachers. Three of the five participants participated in a focus group followed by individual interviews while two participants participated in modified individual interviews. The research findings are reported in this chapter by themes found throughout participants' focus group and interview responses (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Overview of Themes

Participants' responses in the focus group and individual interview were analyzed using axial coding with categorical aggregation, with related instances being grouped

together to form coherent themes (Krueger 1998a; Stake, 1995). While this aggregation reflects the focus group and interview protocols, individual participant experiences refined and enriched the themes that arose during the study. Table 2 provides the results of this analysis, which draw from the 13 cases of the study and encompass all interview and focus group transcripts. Major themes are listed in the left column, while the associated concepts connected to each theme are listed on the right. Additional themes which related less directly to the associate-candidate relationship are also listed and are discussed later in the chapter.

As Table 2 describes, five primary themes arose from the data gathered in the focus group and individual interviews: feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions. These themes encompass the majority of participants' shared experiences of the associate teacher relationship. At the beginning of each major theme, a single participant's experiences are highlighted. As Kosnik and Beck (2009) note, this structure foregrounds each participant's experiences as they relate to that theme. Concepts associated with each theme follow, incorporating experiences drawn from all five participants and their 13 relationships. Additional themes – those that relate peripherally to the associate-candidate relationship – are also included later in the chapter.

Feedback

All five participants explored feedback extensively in their responses to the study. As in the literature presented in Chapter Two (e.g., Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Broad & Tessaro, 2010; Hudson, 2013), participants identified a number of feedback concepts involved in the associate-candidate relationship. Participants cited feedback as evidence of a meaningful relationship and as a central part of developing those relationships. Of these perspectives on feedback, Sarah's is unique, as she reflected positively on all three of her associate teachers.

Table 2

Themes of the Associate Teacher-Teacher Candidate Relationship

<u>Major Themes</u>	<u>Associated Concepts</u>
Feedback (185) ^a	Comparison to peers, Constructive feedback, Feedback mediums, Frequency and timing, Minimal or absent feedback, Recognition, Reflection
Guidance (221)	Co-planning, Gradual release, Independence or a lack of guidance, Modelling, Providing opportunities, Suggestions, Supervision
Support (98)	Care, Classroom support, Emotional support, Individual health
Relationship Dynamics (224)	Personal bond and rapport, Professionalism, Pedagogy, Open communication, Distant relationships
Genuine Interactions (92)	Honesty, Trust, Perceived motivations, Perception, A level playing field
<u>Additional Themes</u>	<u>Associated Concepts</u>
Role of the Teacher Candidate (81)	Active contributor, Openness to feedback, Reaching out, Student/teacher transition
Other Factors Affecting the Relationship (139)	Demographics, Other Relationships, Field experience length, School atmosphere, Stress

^a These numbers denote the number of times each theme's associated concepts arose in the data.

Moreover, each of her associate teachers approached feedback differently. Sarah recalled that her first associate teacher, Ms. Sanders, provided extensive feedback: “she wanted to see exactly what I was doing, and gave me direct feedback right away.” In contrast, Sarah explained that her second associate teacher rarely provided formal feedback. As Sarah described, “Not very often. Not very often. . . . Maybe every 2 weeks.” Sarah’s relationship with Mr. Scott did not involve regular feedback; however, she explained that he did offer his thoughts informally through her field experience. These informal pieces of feedback seem particularly tied to the rapport she developed with Mr. Scott, a concept that is explored later in this chapter.

Recalling her third field experience, Sarah said that Mr. Sullivan also offered limited feedback: “[He would say], ‘I liked that you used educational terminology. I liked that you taught them about numerators and denominators.’ And that was kind of it.” Interestingly, Sarah reflected less positively on Mr. Sullivan’s lack of feedback. I wonder if this is connected to the type of informal feedback Mr. Scott provided. During our conversations, Sarah’s examples of Mr. Scott’s feedback extended beyond description to include comments about effectiveness or goals for future lessons. Indeed, recalling a conversation with Ms. Sanders after an unsuccessful lesson, Sarah said “[she told me,] ‘It’ll be better tomorrow. Don’t worry. Maybe try to make things more engaging, or try to do this.’ And so that definitely got me back on track.” Here, Mrs. Sanders’ feedback specifically considers how Sarah might improve. Sarah seemed to appreciate feedback that attempted to move her forward in her development. Similarly, she spoke more positively of feedback that allowed her to reflect on specific aspects of her lessons.

Sarah's experiences, while unique, resonate with many of the concepts of feedback raised by other participants in the study. Through their responses, all five participants identified types of feedback that they encountered during their field experiences. They described comparison to peers, constructive feedback, feedback mediums, the frequency and timing of feedback, minimal or absent feedback, recognition, and reflection. These associated concepts, outlined in the following sections, further clarify what sorts of feedback participants found valuable and what practices were less effective in furthering either their own performance or their relationship with their associate teachers.

Comparison to Peers

Many of the associate teachers involved in the 13 case relationships had mentored other student teachers in the past. Further, the participants mentioned having other teacher candidates also teaching in the schools they were placed in. Thus, that associate teachers might compare their current teacher candidates to previous candidates was not surprising. When this topic emerged, however, participants' responses were primarily negative. All four participants who experienced negative relationships cited comparison to peers as a discouraging factor in their field experiences. Gail shared the following anecdote about such comparisons: "I found that being compared to past student teachers is frustrating. Saying 'Oh, I've had some really great ones' [makes me wonder], will I meet up to your expectations? Or, 'I've had some really crappy ones.'" Ellen expressed a similar discomfort with being compared to her peers:

He had one very successful student teacher recently . . . This student teacher is now well known in the board. He's had LTOs, very successful. . . . I knew he was my associate's previous student teacher, so my associate asked me why I didn't compare

myself to this teacher. Because all of his other student teachers after this very special one compared themselves to him, asking, ‘did I do this better than so-and-so? Did I do this better?’ Like it’s a competition.

For both Gail and Ellen, the prospect of being compared to past student teachers was an uncomfortable one. Ellen’s “competition” and Gail’s “meet up to your expectations” both suggest these comparisons were seen as evaluative, rather than as a tool for growth or progress.

Linda and Dana found peer comparison similarly challenging as a barrier to developing a strong relationship with their associate teacher. Dana described how, during her second relationship, Ms. Dixon had a former student teacher volunteering in the classroom 2 days each week during Dana’s field experience. She noted, “good for them, but it was also a big challenge for me to build that bond, especially just in 4 or 5 weeks . . . because they were there twice a week. . . . It was tough.” For Dana, the regular presence of this former student teacher limited her ability to bond with her associate teacher. Linda described a similar experience from her time in the staff room with her first associate teacher, Ms. Lewis:

Sometimes in the staff room she would talk to some of the other student teachers more than me. . . . You know how that makes me feel? I’m going, ‘Oh, that’s really nice. I’m glad you’re having this nice conversation with this other student teacher.’

Dana and Linda struggled to develop meaningful relationships with these associate teachers. While neither participant referenced direct comparison, both felt undervalued when their associate seemed to spend more time with other student teachers than the participating teacher candidates. As with Gail and Ellen’s discomfort with evaluative comparisons, Dana

and Linda perceived competing with other candidates for their associates' time as a barrier to relationship-building.

One positive exception to this otherwise negative concept arose in the data. Gail, while describing her positive relationship with her third associate teacher, Mr. Garcia, explained that "he told me that I gave him hope for teachers again. . . . Because he had a bit of difficulty with one of his other student teachers from another university." This comment, which arose during Gail's individual interview, contradicts her earlier reflections offered in the focus group. Two differences appear here which set this comment apart from the others. First, the comment reflects positively on the participant. Second, and perhaps more importantly, this anecdote is cross-coded with a different element of feedback than the other comparative comments: recognition. Gail's comment came at the end of a response when she described her associate recognizing her strengths as a teacher. The other comparative anecdotes, in contrast, were often not constructive or geared toward improving candidates' performance. Indeed, as the following section explores, participants particularly appreciated constructive feedback during their field experiences.

Constructive Feedback

All five participants identified constructive feedback as an important element of their relationships with their associate teachers. That is, when discussing feedback, participants noted that they valued honest, specific, actionable feedback that was framed toward how they might move forward in their teaching. Sarah and Linda both had associate teachers who would take detailed notes during their lessons before providing feedback. As Linda noted, "Going over the evaluation was – we had to sit down and go over it. Step by step, and explain things." Similarly, Sarah explained that:

She had my lesson right on her desk, watching me, looking at the lessons, and she would make notes right on the lesson plan so that she knew she didn't have to forget anything. And then she would give that to me. So I would see her notes exactly where something went wrong, or where something [went well]. It was both negative and positive feedback, which was good.

The participants, thus, appreciated thorough feedback that could be linked to specific parts of their teaching. Ellen expressed similar approval for actionable feedback. She noted that both of her associate teachers gave feedback on specific behaviours, saying “things as simple as ‘You look to the left side of the room more than the right.’ Or one thing . . . which I’m still working on is saying ‘Okay’ [too often] in my lessons.” Interestingly, while constructive feedback arose much more often in the context of a positive relationship, participants did express an appreciation for constructive feedback regardless of the strength of their relationship with their associate.

Across the 13 case relationships, participants reflected positively on associate teachers who provided feedback that was framed as moving toward improvement. Dana described such a conversation with her second associate, noting:

She just printed off a sample evaluation and just went through it with me, [asking] ‘Where do you think you are? And this is where I think you are. And let’s take a couple that we can work on to achieve for higher standards for that.’

Sarah drew a contrast between this form of feedback and more negative feedback, noting her associates’ comments were “always positive and constructive feedback, there was no ‘You did this wrong, you need to...’” This is not to suggest that all feedback must be praise. Rather, the participants valued feedback that allowed them to learn from their experiences.

Gail described the practice as “You're strong in this, next time try this.” Linda in particular spoke to the importance of hearing critiques of her teaching:

I was really open for her to tell me anything, and she told me anything in regards to my teaching. Good and bad, and I was accepting of both of them. I thought, ‘Oh yeah, maybe I should do that different[ly] next time.’

The participants therefore valued feedback that was clearly rooted in their teaching and designed to refine their abilities in the classroom. As Dana summarized, “he always had a reason behind why he said something, and he explained it to me.”

Feedback Mediums

Associate teachers may choose to provide feedback in a number of formats.

Participants described associate teachers providing feedback verbally and in writing: through casual conversation, debrief discussions, evaluations, handwritten lesson plan comments, emails, and text messages. Provided the quality and quantity of feedback matched participants’ needs, the participants spoke well of each of the mentioned formats. Indeed, participants’ descriptions of feedback were split across these two mediums: of the 28 explicit references to feedback mediums, 13 referred to written comments and 15 referred to verbal feedback. Dana spoke positively of the verbal feedback she received from her third associate, noting “he would always give me little pointers” that helped guide her practice. Ellen, similarly, reflected on the casual nature of her first associate’s verbal feedback:

The first one, I had a close relationship, so we would talk a lot in the morning when we were out on duty together. It was just a very natural form of verbal feedback. I didn’t get written feedback from her, but I also didn’t feel like it was needed. I think she was sharing so much of the verbal feedback.

Here, Ellen highlights that she received minimal written feedback from her first associate, but that the verbal feedback she received provided the information she needed. In contrast, Ellen's second associate provided extensive written feedback:

For the first week he provided me with written, typed feedback every day. . . . Which was fantastic, in that he would comment on what I did well, what I needed to work on. And I do consider myself good at taking feedback. So every day I would print it off, highlight things, circle things, write goals for what I could do better. I took that very seriously.

Sarah also highlighted that her first and second associates favoured different forms of feedback. Her first associate teacher provided detailed written feedback on many of her lesson plans, allowing Sarah to reflect on specific, actionable comments. In contrast, her second associate teacher "gave [her] the freedom" to experiment with teaching while receiving infrequent verbal feedback. Although the format of the feedback Sarah received changed, both of her associate teachers were able to meet her needs as a teacher candidate. Thus, both Sarah and Ellen demonstrated an appreciation for constructive feedback regardless of its format.

While acknowledging that they appreciated feedback in either format, Sarah, Linda, and Ellen each noted that written feedback had more permanence than verbal feedback. For these three participants, thorough written feedback afforded them the opportunity to reflect on the feedback they received long after the feedback had been delivered. This does not undermine participants' appreciation for verbal feedback, but rather highlights the connection between written feedback and reflective feedback, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Frequency and Timing

Frequency of feedback relates to how often feedback is offered, while timing denotes when such feedback is provided. Participants tended to prefer frequent feedback about their performance. Gail and Linda both recalled wanting to ask their associate teachers to sit down with them at the end of every day to discuss that day's lessons. Similarly, Sarah recalled that "in my first placement, it was every day, sometimes a few times a day, depending on if she had something to say about different lessons." Four of the participants also indicated that they needed less feedback as their field experiences progressed, particularly after the first practicum. Interestingly, participants seemed more able to recall specific comments from their associate teachers in relationships where this "ongoing feedback" was available throughout the field experience.

Extending from frequency, four participants also expressed preferences for when they wanted to receive feedback. Linda's first associate teacher, Ms. Lewis, often offered feedback in front of students. While this feedback was frequent, Linda felt undermined in her role. She recalled: "You know what I felt like saying to her. She would just throw comments out to me. . . . She would say it out loud, the kids would hear it." Linda's frustration was clear: while Ms. Lewis did offer prompt feedback, Linda did not want to feel criticized in front of her students. Ellen also struggled with the timing of feedback. She explained:

There was a moment where he had done my part-way evaluation, and up until then I thought I was doing an okay job; he hadn't said anything negative to me in a while. Then he sat down with me in maybe the last 15 minutes of the prep and he said, 'so I have to give you your part-way evaluation, so I'm just going to do it now, okay?'... 15 minutes left.

Having not received feedback for some time, Ellen was surprised when Mr. Evans' evaluation arrived before a transition period. Indeed, Ellen became visibly frustrated with her associate teacher during their conversation. Gail and Dana shared similar experiences. Like Ellen, they had not received feedback from their associate teachers in some time. When they received evaluations that did not match their perception of their own work, they too expressed frustration. I wonder if Gail, Dana, and Ellen would have reflected more positively on their relationships with these associate teachers if they had received feedback more frequently before receiving these evaluations.

Minimal or Absent Feedback

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the participants reflected negatively on field experiences where they did not receive frequent feedback. In particular, however, all participants were disappointed when they did not receive feedback that they believed would have benefited them in their development as teacher candidates. Dana explained that while her second associate teacher did offer feedback, she did not believe Ms. Dixon's feedback pushed her to improve her performance. At the end of her field experience, Dana's faculty advisor shared that "your associate told me that you told them that you can only handle a couple of things at once, so, break down the tasks for you. So she hasn't wanted to push you." This comment caught Dana off-guard—she did not realize that Ms. Dixon was concerned about her performance. By not receiving this feedback, Dana was unable to improve through this field experience. Ellen shared a similar frustration. She recalled, "I had my evaluation a week and a half into my practicum . . . It was really quick. He stopped giving feedback after that." Like Dana, Ellen received less feedback than she felt was necessary. While there was no further need for evaluative feedback, Ellen regretted not

receiving the ongoing formative feedback that Mr. Evans had included throughout the first week of her field experience.

Interestingly, minimal feedback sometimes also served to obstruct the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. All four participants who experienced negative relationships mentioned minimal feedback as a contributing factor. Gail recalled that “I felt I wasn’t able to approach her and ask her that question [about a lesson], because she wasn’t giving feedback anyway.” Certainly, if teacher candidates do not believe they are receiving enough feedback, they should discuss the issue with their associate teachers. As Gail shared, however, she did not feel confident in their relationship to take this step. Dana’s relationship with Mrs. Davis offers a more striking example. Dana explained that when she chose to end her relationship with Mrs. Davis, her faculty advisor responded saying “Oh, we actually heard that you were doing really well, that she [Mrs. Davis] was surprised, that she really liked the way you interact with the students. Which is why I’m surprised your relationship isn’t good.” Dana admitted she did not know Mrs. Davis appreciated her work in the classroom. Indeed, Dana suggested that had Mrs. Davis shared this feedback with her as well, she may have felt motivated to continue the field experience. Thus, while the primary purpose of feedback is to improve teacher candidates’ performances, such feedback also seemed to contribute to participants’ perceptions of their relationships with their associate teachers.

Recognition

Participants mentioned associate teachers recognizing the quality of their work 35 times during their interviews, matching minimal feedback for the most frequently described concept within the theme. As with other forms of feedback, participants associated

recognition with the quality of their relationship with their associate teachers. Sarah recalled that in her relationship with Mr. Scott, recognition was informal yet frequent. She explained, “he made me feel like I was doing just fine. And I was. He didn’t give me any reason to doubt myself.” Sarah’s examples included receiving encouragement after a successful experience and continued positive interactions even after less successful lessons.

Alternatively, Gail shared a more explicit form of recognition from her practicum with Ms. Green, saying:

In my second field experience, when I got my evaluation on the last day, we had a bit of a party. We watched a movie and she gave me the evaluation. She said that I did an awesome job and that she thinks that I’ll be a great teacher. And then I looked at the evaluation and realized that, wow, I did do a good job. And I worked really hard for that, and I learned so much from her and from that class. It was a valuable experience. Knowing I was successful and seeing it come through and being told that I was successful was an awesome thing.

Gail’s goodbye party is not a unique experience. Here, however, she connected her appreciation of that recognition with a reflection on her field experience and her relationship with her associate teacher. Linda and Ellen similarly shared that they appreciated when their associate teachers recognized additional efforts. For these teacher candidates, such recognition demonstrated that their associate teachers saw value in their work and wanted to see such work continue. Thus, recognition seems to be connected to teacher candidates’ perceptions of care, which is discussed later in this chapter.

Reflection

All five participants described their associate teachers using reflection on performance as a structure for providing feedback. Participants appreciated reflection regardless of the quality of their relationships with their associate teachers. Dana, for example, did not have a strong relationship with Ms. Dixon but recognized that she encouraged reflection during the field experience. As Dana explained:

We did a mid-review, and so we worked on some things. . . . She printed off a sample evaluation and went through it with me, [asking], ‘Where do you think you are? And this is where I think you are. Let’s take a couple that we can work on to achieve higher standards for that.’

Here, Ms. Dixon encouraged Dana to reflect on her own work and consider how she might improve during the field experience. While Dana did not reflect positively on this relationship, her response to this reflective review seems more positive than other participants’ responses to evaluations that did not involve reflection. Sarah, similarly, reflected more positively on her relationship with Ms. Sanders than her relationship with Mr. Sullivan. Recalling Ms. Sanders, she said “we had a great relationship. We basically debriefed every day.” In contrast, when describing her relationship with Mr. Sullivan, Sarah regretted that the school’s schedule did not offer many opportunities for reflection. Sarah tended not to draw on her experiences with Mr. Sullivan, perhaps because she did not have as many opportunities to reflect on her work during the field experience itself.

Perhaps the most extensive example of reflection took place during Linda’s second field experience, with Mrs. Lee. Linda explained that Mrs. Lee provided feedback during every lesson, writing her comments in a book for Linda to read. Linda noted,

She would put the time down and write all of these comments, and then she would talk about that with me after school. And then I would have to take that book, and I would have to reply to it and do my own reflection.

Linda found this ongoing reflection extremely valuable. By replying to her associate's comments in the journal, Linda was able to develop her skills after she and Mrs. Lee had gone home for the day. As with the feedback that Ellen recalled highlighting earlier in this chapter, this journal seems to have been a welcome form of feedback. Interestingly, Mrs. Lee acquired this practice from her own time as a teacher candidate. Linda said "She's carried that on because it worked so well for her. And I thought it was great. I would go home and read over her comments and reflect. . . . It started to make me stronger and more confident." Here, Mrs. Lee drew on her own experiences as a teacher candidate to try and further Linda's development in the profession. This common effort of reflection on practice seems to have enhanced their relationship and contributed to Linda's perception of feedback and the broader practicum. Thus, while feedback necessarily contributed to participants' development as professionals, participants also seemed to experience feedback as an important part of their associate-candidate relationships during the field experience.

Guidance

Apart from relationship dynamics, participants mentioned guidance more often than any other theme, and often reflected on their relationships with their associate teachers in terms of the different guidance strategies they encountered. Like feedback, this theme also stems from the literature explored in Chapter Two (e.g., Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Martin & Russel, 2010; Rideout & Koot, 2009). Participants identified concepts relating to guidance including co-planning, gradual release, independence or a lack of guidance, modelling,

providing opportunities, suggestions, and supervision. While feedback concepts were a response to participant actions, guidance often shaped the teacher candidates' future choices. Gail in particular reflected on the guidance her second associate teacher, Ms. Green, provided. After experiencing a practicum with limited guidance, Gail appreciated Ms. Green's commitment to mentoring her teacher candidates. Comparing guidance to reviewing students' Ontario Student Records (OSRs), Gail said, "You're giving us, as teacher candidates, a background. And that's what I think is one of the most important things to give us." Guidance in Ms. Green's classrooms took many forms, including contextual examples. As Gail recalled, "giving examples of what you've done in the past is really helpful. Because if we haven't, as teacher candidates, planned a unit on that topic, . . . it's nice to see examples and to understand where they usually start off." At the site of study, participants only experience direct teaching opportunities in the final year of the program. For Gail, these examples augmented her knowledge and allowed her to consider new approaches. Extending from examples, Gail recalled "[Ms. Green] would tell anecdotal stories – what happened with that student and how she solved it. . . . [She would say,] 'If that comes up again, maybe try this strategy. It's worked for me in the past, here's why.'" These anecdotes connect the associate teacher's guidance with specific students and specific situations, building the teacher candidate's understanding as the practicum proceeds.

Gail selected particular words when describing her experiences with guidance. While she appreciated detailed information, Gail also valued flexibility. That is, Gail sought guidance, not instruction. She explained, "even though I want the example of the mould [to follow], I want a little bit of leniency to it." When describing a math lesson she co-planned with Ms. Green, for example, Gail recalled that she was able to adjust the structure of the

lesson to reflect her own teaching style. Gail respected associate teachers who offered guidance and then “let [the teacher candidate] decide if it would fit.” This structured independence allowed Gail to act on her associate teacher’s input and infuse those suggestions with her own ideas.

At times, however, Gail acknowledged that she also benefited from direct practices like modelling. Observing Ms. Green demonstrate specific strategies allowed Gail to become more comfortable with incorporating them into her own lessons. She recalled,

[Ms. Green] offered to model strategies that I was a little bit hesitant for. So for math, having a [debrief discussion] with the class. She said, ‘I know you’ve only seen one, with me doing it, but how about I do this [debrief]. You ran the lesson, I’ll do the [debrief], and then next time you do it.’

As Ms. Green modelled the strategy, Gail observed. Gail continued,

I was sitting there thinking, ‘that’s the question that I would pose.’ And it was great that she was able to model it for me, because then I felt more confident in myself making my connections with her as an experienced teacher.

Gail’s comments identify two benefits to this practice of modelling. As a developing teacher, she increased her understanding of how to run an effective discussion with her students.

More immediately, however, Gail also felt more confident engaging Ms. Green in pedagogical discussions. Gail was able to identify where she and Ms. Green shared teaching strategies and where she might still have questions. As Gail shared during her reflections on her other relationships, when she received more guidance from her associate teacher, she was able to learn more from challenging situations in the classroom. As the following sections therefore explore, each of the participants appreciated associate teachers who offered

guidance in a way that supported the continued development of their relationship during the practicum.

Co-Planning

Of the guidance strategies participants discussed, perhaps the most collaborative is co-planning, where associate teachers work with teacher candidates to develop lessons as a team. All five participants experienced co-planning with at least one of their associate teachers. Linda recalled that “we would talk together about what things would work, how best to approach it, talking about if I’m going to put them into groups, figuring out who should be in those groups, and who should not be.” As Linda suggested, co-planning often involved addressing a series of questions about upcoming lessons. Gail shared a similar experience, recalling Ms. Green asking “Okay, so they've got the general concept of basic patterning. How can we show them the next step in more complicated patterning?” These questions provided a focus during the co-planning process, particularly as the participants began their field experiences. Linda described this experience, saying “she helped me brainstorm because you have all of these ideas, but right off the bat, you're [thinking], ‘Oh, I don’t know what I’m supposed to do. . . . Oh my god, what am I supposed to do?’” Linda relied on these brainstorming sessions with her associate teacher as she began her field experience. Sarah’s associate teachers used similar co-planning strategies, particularly when considering classroom management. Sarah explained that her associate teacher “found this management app on the iPad called Classroom Dojo [and asked], ‘Why don’t we try this?’” Sarah continued, “It ended up working pretty well. . . . If she hadn’t suggested that, I would've had no idea about the app, or even to think of using an app as a management tool.” Once more, co-planning allowed Sarah’s associate teacher to expose her to new strategies in

the classroom. Dana recalled Mr. Doherty using co-planning to address new challenges throughout the field experience: “He would say, ‘Hey, let’s fix this.’ Or, ‘let’s figure this out.’ So then we’d try again. Every day on prep, we’d try and figure things out.” Co-planning thereby enhanced participants’ abilities and allowed them to work with their associate teachers as they adjusted to the process of teaching.

Gradual Release

Participants described a “gradual release in education” whereby their associate teachers provided progressively less guidance as their practicum skills developed. Apart from Dana, every participant appreciated associate teachers who transitioned from providing detailed, frequent guidance to offering increased independence with occasional oversight. Sarah shared that her first associate teacher, Ms. Sanders, required a hard copy of every lesson plan for the first 10 days of her field experience. As the placement progressed, she explained that “[Ms. Sanders] didn’t need those anymore, so I had more freedom – I think that helped me a lot.” Linda echoed Sarah’s comments, explaining that her associate teacher often provided more guidance at the beginning of her field experience:

As the weeks went on, I was more ready to say ‘two reminders, and then the third time you’re going to have a little time out.’ . . . But at first you’re so busy making sure I got through what I had planned, that sometimes . . . [I would] give them 10 reminders, but that wasn’t really doing anything. So it was those kind of things that she would write down.

Just as Ms. Sanders no longer required a copy of Sarah’s lessons, Linda’s associate teacher no longer needed to remind Linda about classroom management; therefore, such comments dwindled.

Interestingly, Gail and Ellen highlighted the importance of making this release an explicit process. Gail recalled that daily conversations transitioned into check-in points, saying “we’d just check in every day, instead. [She would ask,] ‘do you need me for anything? What’s tomorrow looking like? Okay, cool. See you tomorrow.’” Thus, for Gail, these conversations shifted gradually. Ellen, however, did not experience a transition. She explained,

The last 2 or 3 weeks of my field experience, he was barely in the classroom. . . . He wanted to be so much a part of my teaching [during] the first couple weeks, [he] really pushed me to do things that he wanted me to do. And then he just fully let go.

Unlike Gail, Ellen’s increased independence seemed to appear suddenly. Without an explicit transition, Ellen felt disconnected from her associate teacher. Thus, during her interview, she often reflected that she received little guidance during the second half of her field experience. When teacher candidates perceived a possibility for future guidance, they were more likely to reflect positively on their experiences with that associate teacher.

Independence or a Lack of Guidance

Extending from gradual release, participants appreciated opportunities to make their own decisions and teach unsupervised during their field experiences. As Ellen shared when reflecting on gradual release, however, participants may also perceive this lack of guidance negatively. Indeed, 15 of the references to this concept included positive reflections while 20 addressed negative experiences. Dana shared the following interaction from her first field experience, saying:

She wanted me to teach drama. . . . Then she said, ‘I don’t teach drama, I can’t help you in any way.’ So then I provided her with an outline, and she said, ‘I don’t even

know what any of this is, because I don't teach drama.'

While Mrs. Davis recognized that drama was beyond her skill set, this interaction frustrated Dana and hindered their relationship. Later in the practicum, Dana and Mrs. Davis had a disagreement over a lesson plan Dana had prepared. Dana explained that Mrs. Davis expressed frustration that Dana had not met the expectations for the lesson. Sharing her thoughts, she said, "I don't know what you want from me, then. Because I just gave you something and it's not what you want, but you've also told me, don't go to you for help. Just don't do it." Dana did not interpret these conversations as a chance to work independently. Instead, she perceived Mrs. Davis' lack of guidance as an unwillingness to help, further reducing the likelihood that Dana would approach her associate teacher in the future.

Several other participants also discussed the implications of a perceived lack of guidance. In each case, teacher candidates attempted to guide themselves through the field experience, though some were more successful than others. Linda confessed that "I felt so unprepared going into the second [practicum] because I had nothing – I wasn't building on anything, it was just nothing. There's nothing there. She was not there. She just left. The day's over, bye." Linda's emphasis conveys the difference between the amount of guidance she received and the amount of guidance she felt she needed. To compensate, Linda explained that she would "go about and do my own thing. I felt very disconnected. I had to make my own path." Reflecting on a similar independence, Ellen said that while she did learn from the experience, "it did make me uncomfortable with his direction. It didn't make me feel confident as a teacher." Both Ellen and Linda adjusted to making their own decisions during the field experience. As they described, however, their perception of this independence affected their relationship with their associate teachers. Like Dana, their

experiences limited their ability to rely on their associates' guidance as the practicum proceeded. Gail echoed their comments, saying:

I spent more time on lesson plans at night, trying to figure out what was a good idea, trying to plan 3 days ahead, having to change those lessons because we didn't cover everything, and accommodating those 3 days ahead yet again.

Here, Gail spoke to a logistical challenge of working independently. As a beginning teacher, Gail was still developing her ability to time lessons effectively. Without her associate teacher's guidance during this process, Gail found herself redoing lessons, again independently. In each of these cases, participants struggled to succeed when the amount of guidance they received did not match their needs as a teacher candidate.

Despite these challenges, participants had praised associate teachers who provided explicit gradual release during the field experience. A lack of guidance, then, does not seem unwelcome. Sarah particularly appreciated opportunities for independence. Her second field experience, with Mr. Scott, was far less structured than her experience with Ms. Sanders and accordingly involved less guidance. Comparing the relationships, she said "It was equally great. The only difference was there wasn't as much mentorship there. He didn't want my lesson plans every day." Throughout our conversations, Sarah reflected that while Mr. Scott did not offer much guidance, she had a positive relationship with him and felt free to experiment in his classroom. Sarah understood that this was an individual experience, saying:

It depends on your personality, too. You might want that strong feedback and guidance that whole time. But I really liked having the independence second block.

Whereas, if that would have happened during my first field experience, I would have probably fallen apart.

Thus, for Sarah, Mr. Scott's lack of guidance was helpful during her second field experience but would have been unwelcome during her first placement. Interestingly, apart from Ellen's mixed reflections on Mr. Evans' lack of guidance, the other participants' negative experiences with absent guidance all occurred during the first field experience. As Sarah suggests, when teacher candidates experience an independent relationship may also be significant to their perceptions of their associate teacher as a mentor in the program.

Modelling

Unlike most aspects of guidance and feedback, modelling takes place in front of students during instructional periods. Modelling refers to explicit demonstrations, where their associate teachers would identify the strategies they were using in the classroom. This concept was mentioned 25 times during the data collection process. For example, Dana recalled Mr. Doherty providing guidance in action, saying "throughout the class, if he was teaching a lesson, he would stop and say, 'Oh, by the way, this is what I like to do on the Smart board.'" Dana remembered several instances of Mr. Doherty interrupting his own lesson to provide these comments. Similarly, Linda explained that Mrs. Lee would often model classroom management strategies mid-lesson if Linda seemed to need support. This practice of "stepping in" will be explored further in the classroom support section later in this chapter.

As in Linda's example, several participants linked modelling to classroom management strategies. Sarah explained that Ms. Sanders and Mr. Scott would first address classroom management issues before explaining their process: "then they would come to me and say, 'Well, if you're having a problem with this student, this might be why, and this is how I approach him, maybe you can try that.'" Similarly, Dana and Mr. Doherty had similar

conversations after encountering classroom management issues: “[He’d say,] ‘see what I did there? This is really good.’ Or, ‘Hey, can you check on this student?’ Or, ‘Come here, watch this when I interact with this student. This is how I want this to happen.’” In these cases, the associate teachers addressed a situation before making their decision-making process explicit to the teacher candidate. In so doing, such interjections became opportunities for modelling during the field experiences.

Participants tended to associate lengthy modelling with the observation phase of the field experience, referring mostly to brief interjections during their instructional time. Recalling her observation periods, Gail said “mainly I just watched the classroom. In my interactions I asked some questions about the class, and it was more a focus on how they taught, and showing me how they teach.” Linda shared similar experiences of watching her associate teacher and attempting to analyze their decisions. In part, this reflects the structure of the program of study, which includes “observation days” designed for this purpose. Interestingly, however, participants spoke positively of the shortened modelling they experienced in the remainder of the field experience. Gail offered a possible explanation, saying, “when we go to supply [teach], what are we going to do? It’s just going to be us. Model that a couple of times, and then give us responsibility.” For Gail, brief modelling allowed her the opportunity to practice her skills soon after receiving her associate teacher’s guidance. As with gradual release, this suggests the participants recognized their developing skill set as it related to teaching independently once they entered the profession.

Providing Opportunities

All of the participants appreciated when their associate teachers provided opportunities to extend their involvement within the field experience. Dana appreciated that

Mr. Doherty allowed her to extend her involvement, saying “it was never like I was invisible in that class. I was never told to just sit and watch.” Similarly, Sarah recalled Mr. Sullivan asking “We have English next, do you want to teach this lesson?” For Sarah, such opportunities connected to concepts of trust and independence. She explained, “there was definitely a bigger freedom aspect, and I guess a trust aspect there, too. Because he just said ‘Go for it.’” Such opportunities encouraged participants to invest in their field experience. Ellen explained that when Ms. Edwards encouraged her to teach lessons during her observation period, the opportunity “made me feel like part of the classroom so early on. . . . That made me feel more motivated [to] prepare extra lessons.” This motivation sometimes extended beyond the length of the field experience itself. During her interview, Linda explained that she was still involved with Mrs. Lee’s classroom, several weeks after the practicum had finished. She said, “I did EQAO for the grade 3s the one week. . . . I knew them because I taught them drama. And then I was there all last week working with the grade 5s.” Ellen and Sarah also returned to visit their associate teachers long after their field experiences ended. These teacher candidates felt an increased connection with associate teachers who provided opportunities within the classroom, improving their relationship and perception of the field experience as a whole.

Interestingly, several of the opportunities participants identified extended beyond teaching in the classroom. One participant recalled that one of her associate teachers was well-connected within the school board, saying “it’s nice to have those connections, and I know he would still introduce me to people if I asked him tomorrow.” As with Gail’s comment about supply teaching, this participant’s experience reflects an awareness of the profession beyond her teacher education program. She continued, “his last six teacher

candidates all have jobs. Which is so challenging in Ontario right now. It's incredible how he can get people to where they want to go. He's very influential." While her attention to employability is unique, the participant recognizes that her associate teacher was willing to provide opportunities outside of her role as a teacher candidate in the field experience. Sarah, similarly, shared that Ms. Sanders invited her to attend parent-teacher interviews. Explaining that she "was there until 9 o'clock that night," Sarah recalled using the opportunity to plan several units for her field experience. Both Sarah and Linda cited a variety of extracurricular opportunities, including coaching school teams and chaperoning student trips. Whether related to teaching, employment, or extracurriculars, teacher candidates appreciated associate teachers who provided additional opportunities during their field experiences.

Suggestions

Participants reflected positively on associate teachers who made suggestions to guide the decision-making process. As a concept, suggestions were referenced 32 times during the study. All five participants emphasized the way their associate teachers worded these suggestions. When Ms. Sanders suggested ideas to Sarah, Sarah recalled that "she didn't say it in a dictator kind of way. It was, 'Hey, why don't you try this? I think this would make your teaching better, or I think this would be better for the class.'" Sarah used the word "dictator" several times during her interview, and appreciated that none of her associate teachers gave instructions that seemed absolute. Dana echoed this preference for lenience, saying her third associate teacher treated suggestions as "a two-way street, whereas in my other relationships, [it seemed like] 'You're going to do what I say, and that's that.'" As Dana and Sarah suggest, participants preferred guidance that supported their decision-making abilities. Linda commented that she appreciated when receiving a suggestion "didn't mean

you had to do it. It just meant that's something to consider. That worked wonders." Each of the teacher candidates felt more comfortable working with their associate teachers when the guidance they received allowed this flexibility.

Supervision

While every participant appreciated suggestions, participants were mixed in their reactions to being supervised by their associate teachers. Three participants recalled supervision negatively in most instances, while two participants tended to appreciate being supervised. For example, Dana enjoyed the extensive supervision she had during her third field experience. She recalled, "it was very, very good. He wanted to see things, and I had to have a lot of things prepared . . . so I'd show my associate those things as well." Dana explained that her third field experience also included an extra week of supervised lesson planning. She said, "I think it was very beneficial. I think a lot of people were jealous of me. I almost feel like everyone should have something like that." For Dana, these additional expectations alleviated stress and ensured she was prepared to begin her field experience. Sarah, similarly, felt comfortable being supervised by her associate teachers, saying "I liked having them there, to be honest. . . . I think I had a pretty good relationship with my associates, so I felt more comfortable in that situation." Here, Sarah touches on a commonality between herself and Dana: both teacher candidates appreciated supervision from associate teachers they felt comfortable approaching. In contrast, Ellen described feeling "much more stressful . . . knowing that you're doing your job while they're watching your every move." Ellen, who did not feel comfortable approaching Mr. Evans, felt scrutinized when he supervised her lessons. Gail and Linda both said they felt as though they

were “under the microscope” when being supervised by their first associate teachers. Thus, participants’ responses to supervision varied considerably.

Interestingly, individual participants also responded differently to supervision in different field experiences. While Gail found Mrs. Gray’s supervision discomforting, she felt confident when Ms. Green supervised her teaching. She explained, “I felt I could approach her, I felt confident in what I was teaching because her suggestions were what were in my head. And that was good.” Likewise, Linda appreciated Mrs. Lee’s supervision after explaining she found Ms. Lewis’ supervision unnerving: “You know, some teachers would just leave, right? But she sat there. Right to the end.” I wonder if, as with modelling, teacher candidates are more likely to appreciate supervision when associate teachers state their goals explicitly. Gail recalled a day when her associate teacher was supervising her lesson, explaining that she began to doubt herself when she saw her associate writing notes at the back of the room. Both Linda and Sarah, however, praised their associate teachers for writing thorough comments designed to provide feedback on their performance. As I explore in a later section of this chapter, teacher candidates’ perception seems to influence how they respond to the supervision and guidance their associate teachers use throughout the field experience. As with feedback, then, participants’ experiences of guidance seemed to contribute to their perception of the associate-candidate relationship and its success within the field experience.

Support

Support for teacher candidates during the field experience extends from feedback and guidance. As with previous themes, support has been explored in previous teacher education literature (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010; Hobson et al., 2009; Schulz, 2005). Associate

teachers show support when explicitly encouraging their teacher candidates through such mentorship strategies. Participants valued demonstrations of care, classroom support, emotional support, and attention to individual health from their associate teachers. Dana in particular identified the importance of support for her success in the practicum. Of the five participants, only Dana described two of her field experiences as negative. She recalled that during both of these experiences, she felt unsupported in the classroom and did not believe that her associate teachers were committed to her success. In contrast, during her third field experience with Mr. Doherty, Dana felt highly supported. As she recalled, “It was very, very helpful. I always felt that he was on my side, rooting for me.” After two unsuccessful field experiences, Dana needed to succeed in Mr. Doherty’s classroom or she would not be able to complete the program. With this in mind, Dana offered the following contrast of her experiences:

[In my first two placements] I just wasn’t comfortable seeing what I was doing, and so that was super stressful. I couldn’t make it work, I didn’t feel supported, I didn’t do very well. But with my last associate, I knew what was riding on me, I knew that I had so much support. I was stressed, [but] it was the stress I was putting on myself to do well.

Dana attributes her changing mindset to the support Mr. Doherty provided. Her stress, which will be explored later in the chapter, was mitigated by the relationship she and Mr. Doherty developed. She recalled an email Mr. Doherty sent her during the field experience, saying “I don’t know if I congratulated you on working so hard. Make sure you take time for yourself this week so you don’t burn out.” Here, Mr. Doherty recognized Dana’s stress and reached out to ensure she did not become overwhelmed. Dana particularly appreciated Mr. Doherty’s

care for the students in their classroom, a centerpiece in her philosophy of education.

Relating this care to herself, Dana said:

Sure, he would complain about [the students], but he would always have something positive to say about them as well. Which made me really believe that if he sees negatives in me, he also sees the positives. It was a very, very [relieving] relationship I had with him.

This perspective was key for Dana. Having experienced two relationships where support was not perceived to be the norm, Mr. Doherty's willingness to address both positive and negative situations showed Dana that he valued her as an individual. Thus, rather than existing without criticism, support reminded the participants that despite their challenges they were welcome in the classroom. As the following sections explore, participants' associate teachers reinforced this notion through their care, classroom support, emotional support, and attention to individual health. Each of these aspects contributed to participants' overall sense of success in their field experiences.

Care

Participants appreciated associate teachers who seemed to welcome them into the practicum environment. Indeed, with 30 references during data collection, care was discussed more often than most other support concepts. Ellen recalled how Ms. Edwards demonstrated care, saying "She made me feel respected because I was able to bring something to the table for her. And the environment – always being happy to see me, [being] thankful of when I would do something that was above and beyond." Ms. Edwards' behaviour showed Ellen that her contributions were making a difference in the classroom. This, in turn, encouraged Ellen to continue to invest in her field experience. Like Dana, Gail interpreted an associate's care

for students as a sign that she cared about her as a teacher candidate. She explained,

[I appreciate] them asking you, ‘How are you today?’ And really checking in: ‘Are you ready for today? Is there anything you're excited about, or that you have planned?’ Because that shows that they're in it for our teaching, and for their class. I’d like to see them wanting the quality in our work for their students. Showing that they care about our students. And that it’s a team, starting off.

The check-ins that Gail described resonated with Sarah and Linda, who similarly suggested that informal check-ins demonstrated care for both the teacher candidate and the work she was doing with the students. Associate teachers who seemed to care about their teacher candidates’ successes were accordingly described more positively than associate teachers who offered fewer such reinforcements.

Interestingly, however, participants tended not to expect their associate teachers to go above and beyond in demonstrating care. As Dana commented, “I understand that we don’t have to get support.” Here, Dana recognizes that while she appreciated care, support was not mandatory. Sarah similarly viewed care as an issue of respect. Reflecting on Gail and Linda’s negative experiences, Sarah described care as “giving someone the respect [they deserve]. . . . I really don’t know what goes wrong in other situations, to be honest.” Having experienced only positive field experiences, Sarah was not part of a relationship where care and support were not present. She recalled,

Not one time did I feel undermined, or that I was spoken harshly to, or that I was wanting to cry because of my associate. I felt comfortable, I felt good, I felt confident talking to them because I knew that they were there for me.

I wonder, then, if care is most significantly affected by contradictions—when, as Sarah

describes, an associate teacher's comments suggest that she does not care about her teacher candidate. Linda commented that in a meaningful relationship, associate teachers "have to seem like they're interested in me, in my growth, and in my learning." While such positive demonstrations of care are clearly appreciated, the detractions Sarah alludes to may do more to undermine perceptions of care than positive actions may be able to sustain.

Classroom Support

Of the support mechanisms explored during the study, participants returned to classroom support most often. All five participants appreciated associate teachers who supported their efforts in the classroom, particularly when dealing with difficult situations. Ellen recalled that such support "can really help lessen the intimidation and improve the confidence" felt by beginning teacher candidates. Dana and Gail both spoke well of associate teachers who encouraged them to take risks during the field experience. Remembering a conversation with Mr. Doherty, Dana said "my associate was so understanding, [he said], 'You know what, if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. It happens.'" Gail similarly felt safe when her efforts were supported, saying "that was the most important thing. Knowing you'll get your feedback, you'll get your support, and they're there for you in case you crash." These teacher candidates were able to experiment with their teaching knowing that their associate teachers would still support them if their lessons were unsuccessful. In this way, participants' associate teachers invested in these relationships and in the success of their teacher candidates.

Three participants singled out intervention as a particularly valuable example of classroom support. At times, teacher candidates encounter situations they do not know how to resolve on their own. Gail, Sarah, and Linda each identified situations where their

associate teacher stepped in, addressed a challenging situation, and passed authority back to the teacher candidate. Gail observed that “sometimes it’s more appropriate for the associate to step in than you, because you don’t [know everything], they might not have explained it enough to you, and it’s not your class yet.” Here, Gail recognizes that teacher candidates are still learning and may require their associates’ support in the classroom. Sarah shared her own experience with this process, explaining,

I think right away, when I started my lessons and I wasn’t authoritative enough, she would step in and get [them] back on track first, which was helpful. And then, eventually she would stop doing that once I learned how to manage them.

Like Gail, Sarah acknowledged her limitations and appreciated when her associate teacher offered assistance. Gail and Sarah both refer to a gradual release in this intervention. Over time, Gail and Sarah developed strategies to address such situations without having their associates step in.

How, then, might an associate teacher know when intervening is a welcome sign of support, and when it undermines the teacher candidates’ authority? Indeed, one of Gail’s associate teachers, Ms. Green, apologized after an intervention, saying “I’m sorry that I stepped in and talked to them.” Speaking together, Linda and Sarah offered the following barometer:

If whatever the students are doing is affecting your lesson, affecting other students or affecting you, or the success of your teaching, then I’d be okay with my associate stepping in. But if they’re just stepping in for the heck of stepping in, if everything was going great and they just had to say a comment, a random whatever that had nothing to do with anything, [that’s different.]

That is, Sarah and Linda appreciated when their associate teachers' interventions addressed disruptions and contributed to their success during the lesson. Interruptions that were not constructive – much like providing critical feedback in front of students – did not support the participants in their teaching. Interestingly, Sarah observed that “this is where that relationship really kicks in. My associates knew, this is what happens when I get upset. Or, you can tell that I’m frustrated when I start doing this.” Such cues between the teacher candidate and the associate teacher set the stage for positive, supportive interventions. These “thank you for saving me” moments enhance and rely on the relationship that associate teachers develop with the teacher candidates in their classrooms.

Emotional Support

In addition to the in-class support discussed in the previous section, four participants described situations where their associate teachers offered emotional support during the practicum. Participants described emotional support as an associate teacher offering encouragement, reassurance, or giving teacher candidates time to gather their feelings after a challenging situation. Linda recalled a conversation with Mrs. Lee, explaining: “it’s okay to feel scared. And it’s okay to feel overwhelmed, and it was okay for me to feel nervous, and admit stuff. Yeah, I’m confident, but at the same time, not really.” Linda appreciated that Mrs. Lee understood this uncertainty. Sarah similarly felt reassured when her associate teachers would offer check-ins that focused specifically on her emotional wellbeing. Both participants appreciated being able to rely on their associate teacher when they felt emotionally drained. As Gail described, “your associate is there to help you . . . if you need a little bit of a break, because you're so overwhelmed or tired.” These comments in particular resonate with the themes of stress that are discussed later in this chapter.

Individual Health

In some cases, participants explained that the stress and emotional strain of their field experiences began to affect their individual health. Linda and Sarah both described situations where their associate teachers recognized their struggle and offered their support. Just as Mr. Doherty had emailed Dana about taking time for herself to avoid burnout, Linda and Sarah's associates demonstrated concern for their health. During the focus group, Sarah explained that she was sick for a week before her field experience evaluations. She recalled, "[I was] breaking out. I'm not hungry, just staying up late at night, trying to get all my work perfect in this book to give my cohort leader. . . . I think I lost seven pounds that week." While Sarah's response to evaluations was atypical, she emphasized that her field experience mitigated these challenges. "I loved being at that school, I loved being there in general," she said, suggesting that while she felt challenged, the atmosphere of the field experience allowed her to move forward and reflect positively on the process. Linda faced a similar challenge, saying that she was nervous "to the point where [Mrs. Lee] was worried about me." Linda explained that after Mrs. Lee recognized her struggle, the two "sat down together and said, 'Well, what are we going to do here? Because your health is important, that's number one. Because if you do get so overwhelmed and sick, then what happens?'" Linda appreciated Mrs. Lee's concern and further described how the two worked together to develop strategies to move forward in the field experience. While not every teacher candidate faces health concerns during their time in the program, those participants who did encounter issues were pleased when their associate teachers provided appropriate support. Such examples of support therefore seemed to have had a noticeable affect on participants' perception of their field experiences and their relationships with their associate teachers.

Relationship Dynamics

Relationship dynamics describe the sorts of relationships formed between teacher candidates and their associate teachers, as well as the factors that influence those relationships. Aspects of these relationships have been explored previously in the literature (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2006; Hudson, 2013; Mulholland et al., 2010). In addition to the major themes of feedback, guidance, and support, participants discussed a number of elements that contributed to the relationships they formed during their field experiences. These factors include: personal bond and rapport, professionalism, pedagogy, open communication, and distant relationships. Ellen's experiences highlight the many moving parts in developing relationships with associate teachers. Unlike any other participant, Ellen experienced a positive dynamic in her first practicum followed by a challenging, largely negative field experience. Recalling Ms. Edwards, Ellen said "My first associate opened up with me just as much as I opened up with her. . . . I was very close with [her]." In contrast, Ellen's relationship with Mr. Evans began with a barrier: "My very first day, he told me his wife wouldn't like that he had a female student teacher again. . . . He was being very careful about what kind of relationship he would present to people." In both cases, Ellen's relationship with her associate teacher was central to how she perceived the field experience as a whole. As Ellen described,

My relationship with my associate was a huge part of how I felt and arguably how successful I was with the students. They are there with you every step of the way, and that can be very positive or very negative, depending on your relationship.

Ellen directly connects her relationships with Ms. Edwards and Mr. Evans with the degree of success she felt in her field experience. She acknowledged, further, that while the

relationships teacher candidates form with their students are important, the associate teacher took center stage in her journey through teacher education.

Ellen also identified the importance of ongoing discussion with her associate teachers. She recalled of Ms. Edwards, “we would talk a lot in the morning when we were out on duty together. It was just a very natural form of verbal feedback.” Thus, setting up conditions for conversation allowed Ellen and Ms. Edwards to engage in the feedback, guidance, and support discussed in earlier sections. Ellen expressed similar appreciation for dialogue with Mr. Evans. After one of their more challenging interactions, Ellen recalled that Mr. Evans recognized the setback in their relationship and initiated a conversation to address the problem. In both field experiences, Ellen appreciated when her associate teachers took time to develop a meaningful relationship.

Perhaps most importantly, Ellen acknowledged that what made her relationships meaningful might not apply directly to another teacher candidate. As she described, “Anyone else would really value the business interaction, the actually great relationship that my second associate had.” Mr. Evans, Ellen explained, aimed to develop a professional relationship that would help Ellen’s career. Ellen, however, “value[d] the care of other people in a close relationship,” and therefore Mr. Evans’ efforts often contradicted what Ellen hoped to gain from her experiences. Speaking to the goal of developing a strong relationship, Ellen suggested:

I think being able to connect on a meaningful professional and personal level. So, not just small talk in the morning, but being able to truly know who you're working with as a person. Getting to know what motivates them in the profession, having that

communication so that you're meeting each other's needs with the teacher candidate and the associate teacher.

Ellen's comments are echoed by a variety of experiences the other participants shared about the relationships they developed. Particularly, the following sections explore the concepts of personal bond and rapport, professionalism, pedagogy, open communication, and distant relationships as they relate to teacher candidates' experiences in the practicum.

Personal Bond and Rapport

All five participants discussed the benefits of developing a personal connection with their associate teachers. While the depth of those bonds varied between participants, each cited strong rapports as evidence of a positive field experience. Indeed, with 51 references, personal bond and rapport was the most cited concept influencing the associate-candidate relationship. Recalling her second associate teacher, Mr. Scott, Sarah said "He sat me down the first day, we just had a conversation, we clicked right away. That was good. It was funny, we just sat there, talking and laughing the whole time." Linda recalled a similar interaction with her second associate, Mrs. Lee: "we sat there, probably for an hour when I first met her. Prior to going in for observation days." These initial conversations provided Sarah and Linda with an immediate opportunity to develop a rapport with their associate teachers. In contrast, during Linda's first experience, she explained that "we just showed up. There was no little discussion." As with Ellen's experiences, Sarah and Linda emphasized the impact of early conversations on the overall development of their relationships with their associate teachers.

Participants were divided on the appropriateness of developing a friendship with their associate teachers. Ellen recognized this division in her own reflections on her impersonal relationship with Mr. Evans. Gail, speaking to her preference for more professional

relationships, said “I’ve never put myself in a position where I would seem unprofessional. And that’s probably why I didn’t have as close of a relationship as some of the other[s].” Gail appreciated bonding with her associate teachers but did not want to be perceived as acting inappropriately. Sarah, in contrast, argued that a close relationship was essential to the dyad:

As much as they want to mentor you, if you don’t have that friendship to start, that mentorship isn’t going to work on either end. You might not want to take as much feedback from them because you feel that they don’t really like you, or vice versa.

For Sarah, this sense of friendship underpinned the mentorship and guidance that was to follow. Similarly, Linda shared that she had known her associate teacher outside of the field experience, explaining that “Right away I knew her. Well, not closely, but she was a teacher at my daughter’s [old] school.” These connections—in Linda’s case, a pre-existing one—created a personal bond that Linda and Sarah would use to develop a working relationship with their associate teachers. As Ellen and Gail noted, however, deep-rooted connections were not essential to the relationship they experienced.

Three of the participants offered insights into how rapport supported the success of their practicum regardless of the degree of friendliness they preferred. Sarah and Gail both appreciated opportunities for humour. As Sarah recalled, “we would make each other stupid little pranks and put them on the desks in the morning. It was just fun.” Gail similarly appreciated the chance to tell jokes with her associate during recess supervisions. These examples of humour allowed the teacher candidates to bond with their associate teacher without discussing feedback or upcoming lessons. Dana offered the following observation: “I think being able to have other conversations, other than based on academics. So they are willing to open up.” Thus, for Dana, friendship was not the goal. Rather, she and the other

participants appreciated associate teachers who were able to extend their interactions beyond those required of them as supervising mentors. Even Gail, who preferred professionalism, regretted that her first associate teacher eventually stopped making welcoming gestures. For the participants, a willingness to bond complemented the professional relationship they had with their associate teachers and enhanced their views of the field experience.

Professionalism

Throughout the interview process, participants spoke highly of associate teachers who demonstrated professionalism and encouraged professional dialogues. Thus, professionalism here refers to two sets of behaviour. On one hand, participants valued discussing professional issues and bonding over mutual challenges. Gail's second associate teacher, Ms. Green, often observed the classroom from the back of the room. After one lesson, Ms. Green and Gail discussed some of their students' disruptive behaviours: "She said, 'I didn't realize that certain kids at the back were fidgeting that much. . . . Now she's realizing, 'this might have been happening while I was teaching too.'" Ms. Green's recognition showed Gail that they could discuss classroom challenges and address them together. Likewise, Ellen recalled that "I felt very motivated because she made me feel like I was a valuable part of the classroom." In this sense, professionalism reflects an associate teacher's ability to engage teacher candidates in discussions of profession issues in a way that further develops the teaching relationship.

While participants recalled professional conversations in mostly positive terms, they often drew on negative examples when discussing their associate teachers' behaviours. Dana recalled a situation when her first associate teacher responded to a student's work, noting:

Instead of using the internet or things to play video games, they would actually watch

YouTube videos about being a dentist, and they would learn to read books. And my associate [said], ‘Oh, *pshh*, he’s not going anywhere, he’s not going to be a dentist at all. He’s not going anywhere.’

For Dana, this negative comment created an obstacle to the pair’s relationship. Gail shared a similar experience after overhearing her associate teacher gossip about other staff members: “That made me feel uncomfortable because part of our evaluation is professionalism. So, to watch that take place, [that] was inappropriate to do in front of me.” Here, Gail explicitly connects professionalism with her ability to feel comfortable in the field experience. Linda further linked professionalism to developing relationships when reflecting on the information package the university sent to her first associate teacher: “She couldn’t find it. It was there, somewhere. It took her a while to even find the envelope to go over things.” For Linda, Ms. Lewis’ disorganization was further evidence that she was unprepared to invest in their relationship. Thus, participants expected their associate teachers to demonstrate professionalism during the field experience. When this expectation was met, participants gained respect for their associate teachers and recalled feeling valued and motivated. When participants encountered behaviour they found unprofessional, their relationships invariably suffered. Recalling Ellen’s experiences with Mr. Evans, professionalism seems to strengthen these relationships when used as a building block, rather than a boundary.

Pedagogy

Extending from professionalism, participants identified their associate teachers’ pedagogical choices as influential in the dyad relationship. Four of the five participants described scenarios where they bonded with their associate teacher during pedagogical discussions. Recalling one of her debrief discussions, Gail noted “I was thinking the same

thing. . . . That was exactly what she told me, and it was great knowing that I was starting to master my own teaching.” Gail’s shared perspective with her associate teacher encouraged her to continue to engage in the relationship. One participant commented on the risks of overlapping pedagogies, saying “they know that classroom the best, and you have to understand what they do and try to do it for the most part. It’s monkey-see, monkey-do.” Indeed, in most of the positive relationships, the teacher candidate and the associate teacher seemed to share pedagogical perspectives. Ellen’s first experience, with Ms. Edwards, stood out as an exception to this tendency. Ellen recalled: “Pedagogically, there are some things that are a bit traditional about her teaching. So I wouldn’t say I learned that much more about my own pedagogy through her.” Despite this pedagogical gap, however, Ellen appreciated the relationship she formed with Ms. Edwards and praised her commitment to her students. Thus, positive pedagogical connections seem to be linked to successful associate-candidate relationships.

Three of the five participants associated pedagogical disagreements with negative relationships. Dana believed her pedagogy differed considerably from her first associate teacher, Mrs. Davis. During one of their conversations, Dana expressed her goal to work with students with disabilities to make a difference in their lives. During her interview, Dana recalled Mrs. Davis’ response, saying ““You know what, you’re not. You’re only one person, you’re not going to make a difference in these people’s lives, in these students’ lives. You only have them for 8 months.”” As with Mrs. Davis’ comments about the student who wanted to be a dentist, this response frustrated Dana and added tension to their relationship. Linda felt similarly irritated by Ms. Lewis’ style of interacting with the kindergarteners in their classroom. Linda, who preferred to sit with the students and speak with them at their

level, did not appreciate when Ms. Lewis or her educational assistant did not do the same.

Ellen reflected on the challenge of working alongside an associate teacher who did not share her views, recalling “that was hard on me as a new teacher, knowing that someone I respected didn’t believe in my ideas, or in my values on how children should be educated.”

In all three cases, the teacher candidate did not confront their associate teacher about these issues. Interestingly, while Gail was the only other participant to describe a relationship negatively, she did not describe conflicting pedagogies in her reflections.

Open Communication

All five participants identified open communication as a key part of their relationships with their associate teachers. Their comments link open communication with every major theme discussed during the focus group and interviews: for these teacher candidates, open communication enabled clear feedback, specific guidance, genuine interaction, and ongoing support. As Linda recalled of Mrs. Lee, “she talked to me all the time, we were there until 5 o'clock sometimes. She would always talk to me.” Indeed, for Linda and Sarah, this communication extended well beyond the classroom itself. Sarah explained that Ms. Sanders “gave me her cell phone number, if I needed to text her, if I had a question, or something. We’d always sit down and plan, and [look at] next steps, and things like that.” Most participants had engaged in regular communication with an associate teacher via text message or email. Ellen explained that Mr. Evans was also used to this practice, saying “he didn’t understand why I didn’t text or email him asking questions for the next day.” In this way open communication involves both frequency and format, as teacher candidates and associate teachers link ongoing discussion with an effective associate-candidate relationship.

Several participants admitted that while they were eager to develop relationships with their associate teachers, they did not necessarily know what would be involved in the process. As Ellen recalled, “I didn’t really know what to expect until my first associate teacher.” Participants therefore appreciated associate teachers who took the time to communicate their role within the field experience. Remembering Mrs. Lee, Linda said: “she talked a lot about helping, and what her role was. I didn’t even have a meeting with [my other associate teacher].” This expands upon the use of initial conversations for rapport building. Three participants emphasized their need for open communication during these initial conversations. Gail, in particular, championed the notion that teacher candidates and associate teachers should have a candid conversation about their roles, expectations, and goals during the field experience. Gail experienced a form of this conversation with Ms. Green, but not with her first associate teacher. She recalled:

I think laying it out on the table of what my expectations were, and what I was hoping to get, helped. She was going to give it anyway, I’m sure, because she rocks, but laying it out on the table and saying ‘this is what I need.’

Indeed, each participant echoed Gail’s suggestions for formalizing this conversation that teacher candidates encounter with some associate teachers and not with others. Sarah elaborated that such conversations will vary from pair to pair, and that what she found helpful in one experience might not be helpful in another. Here, Sarah recognized that while all of her experiences were positive, her needs changed between field experiences. Candidates’ changing needs further reflect the value of the open communication Gail proposed. Linda offered her support to the suggestion as well: “we’re all different – we’re going to need different support. They have to realize every student teacher is not just a

student teacher. [They're] an individual.” Open communication enabled teacher candidates and associate teachers to understand these individualized needs and develop strategies to address them. Whether supporting Sarah’s classroom management questions, providing Dana with explicit feedback, or sharing personal experiences with Ellen, associate teachers seem to be better positioned to develop these relationships if they employ open, ongoing communication.

Distant Relationships

In the context of developing relationships, distance seemingly presents itself as the antithesis of open communication and rapport. Certainly this occurred for some participants: Linda and Dana emphasized the challenges that a distant relationship can present during the field experience. Linda reflected on her relationship with Ms. Lewis by saying, “I felt so unprepared going into the second [placement] because I had nothing – I wasn’t building on anything, it was just nothing. There’s nothing there. She was not there. She just left. ‘the day’s over, bye.’” Linda highlighted this sense of emptiness repeatedly during our conversations. Dana shared a similar frustration when reflecting on her time with Mrs. Davis. She explained,

It was maybe 2 months in and I didn’t even know that she knew my name until she actually said it when we were on the playground. I [thought], ‘Oh my goodness, she actually just said my name.’ She [had] never said my first name, we never really talked outside of the classroom.

While Dana spoke positively of the students and the classroom environment, she cited the individual relationship with her associate teacher as central to her decision to leave. Both Dana and Linda struggled to adjust to an associate teacher who did not seem invested in

rapport-building during the field experience. Ellen and Gail shared similar difficulties as they reflected on their negative relationships: each participant that experienced a negative relationship mentioned distance as an obstacle to feeling successful in the field experience.

As explored in previous sections, however, friendliness is not a requirement of associate teachers, nor is openness a guarantee of professional respect. Gail recalled that Ms. Green maintained a distant relationship with her, saying: “I noticed that she doesn’t get personal, which is fine, because she’s a busy woman. But I found that she was there to help me grow, and she always reflected with me.” While Gail had found Mrs. Gray to be too distant, she accepted Ms. Green’s decision not to share personal details. Dana, similarly, commented that she did not expect her associate teachers to personally invest in her. Sarah further reflected that while she had a close relationship with Mr. Scott, he was often absent from the classroom and physically distanced from her learning. In each of these cases, the participants were comfortable with some distance between themselves and their associate teachers. This suggests that the concept of distant relationships is more nuanced than it may seem, particularly as it relates to the other themes associated with developing relationships within the field experience. The following section continues this investigation of the nuances of the associate-candidate relationship and its links with participants’ perceptions of successful field experiences.

Genuine Interactions

Extending from relationship dynamics, genuine interaction describes the affective elements of the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teachers. While explored less frequently than feedback or guidance, genuine interactions have also been considered in past research (Dillon & O'Connor, 2010; Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). When

describing genuine interactions, participants recalled intangible factors that affect their sense of the relationship: honesty, trust, perceptions, perceived motivations, and the idea of a level playing field. Linda, in particular, highlighted the importance of developing a genuine relationship. When asked what makes for a meaningful relationship, she responded “Well, number one, somebody that’s honest. That’s not fake. They have to be an honest person, I have to be able to rely on them, that they’re telling me the truth. They have to seem like they’re interested.” This foregrounding of honesty is central to Linda’s experience in the teacher education program. Linda often described her relationship with her first associate teacher, Ms. Lewis, as “fake,” and suggested that because the pair did not develop a strong relationship, their interactions became a performance. As Linda recalled, “[they would use] that famous ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah,’ but they’re not really listening to you. . . . They’re not hearing what you’re saying.” In contrast, Linda’s second relationship emphasized honesty. Her associate teacher, Mrs. Lee, expected Linda to be honest about her performance and, in turn, was honest about her own experiences: “She’s been through a lot. She told me a lot of her history—we had a very good personal relationship—what she’s come through, and her challenges, that led her to be the person that she is today.” Mrs. Lee’s willingness to share her own experiences helped Linda to feel secure in their partnership. As Linda later explained, this disclosure allowed her to be honest with her associate teacher, particularly when discussing confidence: “[she told me] that it’s okay to feel scared. And it’s okay to feel overwhelmed, and it was okay for me to feel nervous and admit things.” Mrs. Lee further encouraged honest interactions by means of a collaborative journal the two kept during Linda’s field experience. After each of Linda’s lessons, Mrs. Lee would provide written feedback and expect Linda to read and respond to the comments with her own thoughts.

Through these reflections, “[Mrs. Lee] was really adamant about making sure that I was honest about how I was feeling.” This expectation strengthened Linda’s relationship with Mrs. Lee and allowed her to develop a trust in her associate teacher that she was not able to experience with Ms. Lewis. The following sections of this chapter explore how, like Linda, each participant’s relationships depended on genuine interactions between teacher candidates and their associate teachers.

Honesty

Dana and Gail also spoke to the importance of honest interactions in the field experiences. Indeed, honesty and its partner concept, trust, were mentioned 37 times during the study. As with Linda, Dana and Gail valued when their associate teachers were honest about their performance. When reflecting on feedback, Gail contrasted positive examples with comments that suggested her work was “perfect.” Gail noted that since her evaluations were not perfect, she did not value what she perceived to be empty praise. Dana, similarly, expressed regret that her first associate teacher had chosen not to share genuine praise:

If I knew that [she thought I was doing well], I may have been able to stick around and say ‘Okay, if this teacher believes in me, then I might be able to do it.’ But she didn’t give me anything.

Here, both Dana and Gail seem to link honesty with how they responded to their associate teacher and the feedback they provided.

While Dana, Gail, and Linda all spoke positively about honest interactions, each placed more emphasis on their response to dishonest behaviour. During her interview, Dana initially spoke positively of Ms. Dixon, her second associate teacher. As the interview progressed, however, Dana began to describe the relationship as largely negative. She

recalled,

What I thought was an okay relationship turned out not to be the best relationship, because she wasn't honest with me about what I was working on, or pushing me to [succeed]. . . . It seemed like my advisor had a lot more to say than my associate actually ever told me. And she's disappointed in this, and yet she never told me.

The contrast between Dana's day-to-day interactions with Ms. Dixon and what her faculty advisors had told her placed increasing strain on Dana's relationship. Similarly, when reflecting on formal feedback, Dana recalled "[Ms. Dixon] said 'Okay, we'll do it every week.' We did it only once." For Dana, these inconsistencies reduced her ability to rely on her associate teacher.

Gail identified similar concerns while discussing her relationship with her first associate teacher, Mrs. Gray. During one of their conversations, Mrs. Gray shared that "With some teachers, you have to act like you like them. . . . You have to keep going, and pretend you like the person when you may not." Gail continued, explaining:

Just by observing her interactions with that specific person she was speaking of, I noticed some of those behaviours directed toward me, or toward the girl I carpooled with. And it made me question whether she was genuinely in it for me, and for her students.

Mrs. Gray's dishonesty—that is, her admittance that her interactions were disingenuous—caused Gail to question the relationship they had developed. As with Linda and Dana, Gail regarded dishonesty as evidence of a negative relationship with her associate teacher and as an obstacle to her success in the field experience.

Trust

The concept of trust shares similar values with honesty, but was perceived differently by the participating teacher candidates. Where honesty related to disclosure, trust was linked with expressions of confidence and the opportunities made available during the field experience. Recalling her relationship with Mr. Doherty, Dana said, “Right from the get go, he had so much faith that I could do it, and with that faith, it really allowed me to want to try [to succeed].” Ellen echoed Dana’s comment when she mentioned “the amount of trust and the amount of faith she [her associate] had in me.” Ellen and Dana appreciated that their associate teachers seemed to trust them. Sarah elaborated on these comments when discussing the opportunity to lead the classroom while her associate teacher attended to other duties outside of the classroom:

She knew I could handle the class. She knew exactly what I was capable of. . . . [Ms. Sanders said,] ‘You know what, this is yours, just run the class like you normally would, like I was here.’ And that was, I think, a really big thing about [our relationship]. It forced me to come out of my comfort zone because [I thought,] ‘Oh, I have the whole class now. I’ve got to really step up my game.’ And obviously she trusted me enough to do that.

Indeed, Ms. Sanders was not the only associate teacher who left the room for long periods of time. Both of Ellen’s associate teachers left the classroom regularly, which Ellen perceived as a sign of trust. Interestingly, while Linda and Gail noted that their associate teachers sometimes left the room, they did not connect this behaviour with trust. I wonder what influences teacher candidates’ perception of this behaviour as it relates to trust within the relationship.

Two participants also identified the importance of being able to trust their associate teacher (in addition to their associates' ability to trust them). As Sarah explained, "There was a really big element of trust there between me and her. . . . I felt comfortable, I felt good. I felt confident talking to them because I knew that they were there for me." This suggests a bidirectional aspect of trust: participants valued both seeing their associate teachers trust them, and being able to trust their associate teachers themselves. Gail commented that "I wanted to have that relationship so that I knew if I did mess up, that I could depend on them in case I needed to take a step back." Sarah and Gail both cite trusting their associate teacher as central to the development of their relationships and the support structures discussed earlier. That is, there appears to be a connection between trust and strong, supportive relationships in the field experience.

Perceived Motivations

During their interviews, every participant discussed what they perceived as their associate teachers' motivations for taking on a student teacher. These data are inferred, since none of the associate teachers stated their reasons explicitly. Yet, the participants shared strong reactions to apparently negative motivations and expressed appreciation for relationships that seemed to be rooted in professional development. Dana, for example, recalled:

I think the feeling of the associate wanting their student teacher to be successful, and not just doing it for the money, or not just doing it because it's helpful. . . . To be able to have that connection and that accountability, 'If I help this student teacher become the best student teacher that they can be, then they can help future students become the best students that they can be.'

Dana elaborated further, expressing a desire to see teacher candidates and their associate teachers co-develop goals for the field experience:

I think if we both have that in mind – the teacher candidate and the associate teacher – it makes for a meaningful relationship because we have the same end goal in sight. . . . The common goal of having a successful block, and wanting to learn. Wanting to learn, and wanting to be taught. I think that’s a big thing. And wanting to teach the student teacher.

Sarah also spoke to this issue, noting that “it’s a combination of both relationship and wanting to share your knowledge with someone else, as a starting teacher.” That is, in addition to developing a relationship with their associate teacher, Dana and Sarah both sought associate teachers who seemed invested in their development as educators.

How, then, did the participants suggest associate teachers render these goals explicit? In addition to Dana’s comments about goal-setting, Gail offered that day-to-day investment in the relationship was a positive indicator:

Ongoing feedback. Providing opportunity and modelling. . . . Them asking you, ‘How are you today?’ And really checking in: ‘Are you ready for today? Is there anything you’re excited about, or that you have planned?’ Because that shows that they’re in it for our teaching, and for their class. I’d like to see them wanting the quality in our work for their students. Showing that they care about our students.

Sarah, who experienced two positive relationships, agreed, saying “Just by being interested in what you’re doing. Talking to you, giving you feedback. It’s not that hard to do.” Indeed, each of the participants spoke positively of relationships wherein their associate teachers seemed to take the time to ask what Gail called “check-in” questions. When their associate

teachers engaged in themes of support, guidance, and feedback, the candidates perceived their motivations positively and recalled their field experiences positively.

The majority of participants' reflections on motivation involve negative perceptions—namely, the idea that their associate teacher was in the role for “the wrong reasons.” Interestingly, while the participants ascribed positive motivations to both positive and negative associate relationships, negative motivations were connected exclusively to relationships the participants described as negative. Linda and Gail recalled their first associate teachers' behaviours, noting: “It seemed like, for my first one, it was just free time. Free time to just do whatever. . . . To be on Pinterest. On the iPad.” The participants were frustrated by associate teachers who did not seem to invest in their field experience. Some of the strongest reactions, however, came in response to sarcastic comments. As Gail noted, “My first associate [said] ‘Oh, I get so much money from this. Enough to buy groceries!’” Sarah and Linda seemed shocked to hear this, while Dana, who was not present, shared similar frustrations. These comments interfered with the relationships between the teacher candidates and their associate teachers, further affecting participants' desires to engage in genuine interactions.

Considering the goal-setting Dana suggested alongside the challenges of negative perceptions, Ellen offered the following reflection:

Getting to know what motivates them in the profession, having that communication so that you're meeting each other's needs with the student teacher and the associate teacher. They agree to have student teachers, so the associate teachers want to have student teachers with them. There's a reason for that relationship, there's a reason why they decided that. Me becoming a teacher, there's a reason for that: it's the

reason I wanted to go in a certain area. I think it's important that most people in their relationship know what that motivation is, and what they want to get.

Perception

In addition to the notion of perceived motivations, Ellen and Gail also spoke to the influence of perception on the development of their relationships with their associate teachers. As Gail noted:

This is the person who's going to evaluate me. I don't want to make mistakes. So I was very cautious. . . . I wanted to be careful. I wanted to come across as someone who was eager – as I was. I wanted to make sure that I was not seen in a negative light, because that could affect how they perceived me. So I was very careful. And that will definitely prevent me from getting close to someone, if I want to make sure that I'm perceived a certain way.

During her interview, Gail explained that she preferred to maintain a professional distance from her associate teachers. Gail's comments identify that, for her, the risk of negative perceptions limited the extent of her genuine interactions with her associate teachers. Ellen, similarly, recalled a number of incidents when she and her associate teacher disagreed on the importance of how beginning teachers are perceived. Her associate teacher, Mr. Evans, recommended that she leave photocopies of her work in the photocopy room for other teachers to stumble upon, and praised her for “play[ing] that well” when she spoke with the school administration. Ellen recalled, “My motivation was not to have the Vice Principal or Principal think I was this amazing teacher because I was acting like it.” For Ellen, perception obstructed her relationship with Mr. Evans because she was unwilling to present herself illegitimately. As Gail and Ellen spoke to the challenge of perception in their own

experiences, I wonder about the full extent of perception in the relationships between teacher candidates and their associate teachers.

A Level Playing Field

While discussing genuine interactions, four of the five participants shared experiences that related to the idea of a level playing field between associate teachers and their teacher candidates. These experiences connect particularly with concepts of trust and honesty, as an equal dynamic necessarily requires some honesty. As Dana recalled, “[associate teachers] have conversations, even just around you with other teachers, instead of stepping outside to talk. Which to me showed a lot of trust.” By including Dana in these conversations, the associate teacher demonstrated that Dana was privy to confidential information. Participants often described situations where their associate teachers spoke to or about them in particular ways. Recalling a conversation with her third associate teacher, Dana explained that “I referred to him by his first name. I specifically said, ‘Oh, Mr. [Doherty].’ And he said, ‘nope, don’t call me that. This is my first name.’” Ellen, similarly, appreciated how Ms. Edwards spoke about her in front of students. She said, “She treated me more like an equal than a subordinate. Giving me that confidence . . . she made me feel respected.” Ellen would later recall that this sense of equality showed her that Ms. Edwards was invested in their relationship. As Sarah observed,

It’s not like she’s the higher teacher and I’m the little student. There’s a two-way conversation, we’re learning from each other, but not in a hierarchical way. It’s not like ‘I’m teaching you, and you have to learn from me.’ It’s, ‘you learn from me, I learn from you, we get to talk about this, we get to share.’

This sense of sharing reinforced Sarah's belief that her associate teacher engaged genuinely in their relationship. By setting this equal, genuine tone, associate teachers were able to earn the participants' trust and develop meaningful relationships within the practicum. Alongside feedback, guidance, support, and relationship dynamics, genuine interactions contributed to participants' sense of success and improved their overall perception of their experiences. As the remainder of this chapter explores, participants also identified a number of extra-relational factors that influenced their field experiences.

Additional Themes

Throughout the data collection process, participants identified factors and concepts which, while not directly related to the relationship they developed with their associate teachers, nevertheless influenced the quality of the relationships they formed. Thus, these concepts are included in the following sections as additional themes relevant to the research. In particular, participants identified the role of the teacher candidate, as well as several extra-relational factors including demographics, other relationships, field experience length, school atmosphere, and stress. The following sections consider participants' responses as they relate to these issues.

Role of the Teacher Candidate

In this study, my primary focus is the nature of the relationship between associate teachers and their teacher candidates. Accordingly, participants tended to discuss their own needs in relation to their experiences with each of their associate teachers. These relationships cannot occur, however, without the individuals themselves. Participants therefore also spoke to their own role as teacher candidates in the field experience. They identified being an active contributor, having an openness to feedback, reaching out, and the

transition from student to teacher as central to their role. The following sections explore these concepts as described by the participants.

Active contributor. Participants understood that as teacher candidates, they could be more successful with their associate teachers if they contributed actively to their classrooms' needs. Four participants described this concept in their responses. Dana, for example, strove "to be accountable, to be responsible. . . . To show that I am here to learn as much as to be involved [with what] the students are doing. [To] be there asking questions, taking notes." While Dana recognized that the field experience is a learning opportunity, she believed that she would be more effective in her role if she took initiative within the practicum. Sarah, similarly, recalled that she actively engaged her associate teachers to develop her relationships. She explained, "I'm an outgoing person, I love to talk to people, and I wasn't shy talking to them. And they seemed to reciprocate when I had something to say." Here, Sarah attributed some of her success in building three positive relationships with her associate teachers to the active role she took in developing those rapports.

Participants also suggested that teacher candidates may serve as a support to their associate teachers, reciprocating the support they received in the field experience. Recalling Ms. Dixon, Dana said that "[she] was very stressed with the class, so she was excited to have a teacher candidate there to help her out, to give her some relief." Indeed, participants seemed to reflect positively on relationships where they believed they were able to provide such support. Interestingly, however, participants did not appreciate when such contributions were not recognized. During her first practicum, Linda compiled report cards for the students in each of her classes, a unique experience among the focus group participants. Despite this contribution, however, Linda reflected negatively on this apparently inconsistent expectation.

Thus, the teacher candidate's role as an active contributor seems to be tied to recognition and perceived motivation as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Openness to feedback. While all participants expected their associate teachers to provide frequent, detailed feedback, most (four) also recognized the need for teacher candidates to accept such feedback during the field experience. Sarah described this openness as central to developing her relationships, saying “[it involves] openness to feedback and willingness to learn from someone else. I didn’t go into the situation thinking that I knew everything, because obviously I didn’t.” For Sarah, being open to her associate teachers’ input allowed her to thrive in the classroom. Linda agreed, offering the following explanation:

[I had] a willingness to hear critiques of my own teaching, knowing that I still have a lot to learn. And how you approach things. And being open to that, rather than saying ‘Oh, yeah, I don’t care. That’s the way I want to do it.’

Linda also admitted that being open to feedback was a difficult process. When asked what the most challenging part of developing relationships with her associate teachers, she said:

Not being afraid to hear criticism of your style of teaching and your ideas. You have to be willing to hear the critiques. I think when people shut off and don’t listen to the critiques, it doesn’t make you a better person.

Thus, while Linda understood the importance of receiving feedback, she also shared that the process pushed her as an individual. One participant shared her reluctance to take feedback during a challenging relationship, saying “I wasn’t telling them what I was doing in advance because I didn’t want to get shut down.” Participants wanted to receive ongoing feedback, and usually recognized that in order for associate teachers to provide feedback, teacher

candidates would need to be willing to hear such critiques. I wonder how associate teachers and teacher candidates might work together to facilitate this process more effectively.

Reaching out. Of the 13 case relationships explored in this study, participants described only half as positive experiences. When asked if they could change one thing about these relationships, all five participants said that they would want to reach out to their associate teachers. Two participants described a desire to build stronger relationships, two hoped to receive more effective feedback, and one discussed asking for more guidance. In each case, participants chose situations that called on them to approach their associate teacher about these issues. Dana explicitly recognized the importance of reaching out when a teacher candidate's needs are not being met. She said, "when I wasn't getting [what I needed], I assumed – which I shouldn't have – that I was doing okay." Dana realized that this assumption set her back in her field experience and resulted in a lost opportunity. She continued, explaining,

It's my own education, and I need to get out of it what I need to get out of it. If the people who are supposed to be mentoring me aren't mentoring me properly, then I need to make it work.

That is, while associate teachers should provide for teacher candidates' needs, participants recognized their role in reaching out when their needs were not being met.

In addition to their desire to reach out more often, all five participants also cited situations where reaching out enhanced the quality of their field experiences. For Ellen, this involved "chang[ing] the personal tone of [her] relationship" with Mr. Evans, who had established personal barriers at the beginning of their relationship. Gail similarly recalled asking Mrs. Gray for more feedback. She explained,

It would be [me asking] ‘Hey, can you please look at this lesson plan? I’m going to come in early tomorrow.’ Or, ‘do you have time after school to look at this?’ It was a lot of questioning. ‘Can I have you reflect on me? Give me some feedback.’

As with being open to receiving feedback, Gail admitted that this process was challenging. Sarah shared a similar experience when she pushed Mr. Scott to offer more detailed feedback, saying “Hey, I know you said that this was a great lesson, but what could I do more? Don’t just say ‘good,’ tell me something that I can reflect on, and that I can get better at.” While not all of these initiatives were successful, participants recalled that reaching out to their associate teachers could improve their relationships and shape their experience to better suit their needs as learners.

Student/teacher transition. Through the field experience, teacher candidates begin to take on responsibilities in their associate teachers’ classrooms. Importantly, teacher candidates do not have legal authority in the classroom, nor are they certified teachers. Participants described transitioning from being students before entering the program to becoming teachers by the program’s end, referencing the tendency for teacher candidates to be called student teachers in some contexts. As Sarah recalled, “[in] the first practicum I did feel more like a student, and [in] the second practicum I felt more like an independent teacher.” Sarah later described this transition through the metaphor of a baby deer, describing beginning teacher candidates as “a little baby deer with unstable legs.” Indeed, for Sarah, the first practicum involved considerably more guidance and feedback than her experiences with Mr. Scott and Mr. Sullivan. Gail echoed Sarah’s comments, explaining that her needs were greater with Mrs. Gray than when she worked with Ms. Green or Mr. Garcia. With Mrs. Gray, Gail explained,

I needed a lot in terms of: what am I teaching, what are you expecting me to cover? . . . Then when I went into my second and even my third practicum: what am I teaching, where do you want me to start? And then I'll go from there myself.

Here, Gail and Sarah both describe a shift toward independence that reflected their growing confidence as teacher candidates. Accordingly, their needs and their approaches to their relationships with their associate teachers changed as they proceeded in the program.

Despite this transition, three participants highlighted the importance of using the field experience as an opportunity to learn and make mistakes. While Linda discussed the increased responsibility through the field experience, she also acknowledged that “you're learning as you go.” Gail bluntly described the value of the experience, saying “it's better to bomb it in your placement than out in the real world.” In particular, Gail explained that forming a strong relationship with her associate teacher allowed her to recover more quickly if she “bombed” a lesson. Dana offered a similar insight Mr. Doherty shared with her. She recalled, “you don't have to be perfect, it's fine, you are here to learn. It is teacher's college, you're not expected to be perfect. This is where you make your mistakes.” In this way, participants identified their appreciation for mistakes as they transitioned into the profession. The role of the teacher candidate is a complex one, drawing on active contributions, an openness to feedback, reaching out, and the transition from student to teacher. Each of these concepts contributed to participants' understanding of their role in developing relationships with their various associate teachers in the field experience.

Other Factors Affecting the Relationship

In addition to the five major themes identified earlier in this chapter, participants discussed a number of extra-relational factors that sometimes affected the relationships

teacher candidates develop with their associate teachers. These factors included demographics, other relationships, field experience length, program expectations, school atmosphere, stress, and student behaviour. While not directly controlled by either the associate teacher or the teacher candidate, participants suggested that these concepts could affect the quality of the relationships they developed. The following sections explore these concepts in greater detail.

Demographics. More so than any other concept, participants were divided on the influence of demographic factors such as age and gender. As a note, all five participants in the study were female, and four of the five participants were in their early 20s. Among the 13 associate teachers, only five were male, and most were experienced teachers.

Participants' reflections on gender were particularly mixed. Sarah first introduced gender as a point of discussion while she considered what differentiated Ms. Sanders and Mr. Scott's approaches as associate teachers. As Sarah explained, "I don't know if that was the difference between having a female first and then a male, or if it was just their personality." As I had not considered the role of gender in the relationship, I asked Sarah to elaborate. She continued,

There were differences, obviously, in having a male associate and having a female associate. A female was more nurturing and motherly, if that makes sense, and she wanted to see exactly what I was doing, and give me direct feedback right away, whereas my male associate [tended to say,] 'I'm going to let you be independent and try this, do your own thing, and then when I need to step in, I will.' Which was good. I don't know if I would have got that with another female. It really depends on their personality, but I don't know.

Sarah herself was uncertain whether the differences she perceived were rooted in personality or gender. Recall Ellen's experience with Mr. Evans—in that relationship, the perception of gender seemed to play a prominent role. Ellen recalled that “she [Mr. Evans' partner] was more comfortable with him working closely with young male teachers, as opposed to young female teachers.” This dynamic, however, is unique among the 13 cases in this study.

Reflecting on gender, Linda said “I'm not big on the differentiation of gender. I think it's more about the person.” Indeed, Linda pointed out that demographics had not affected her experiences: both of her associate teachers were female, both had been teaching for many years, and both were roughly her age. In her individual interview, I asked Sarah to reflect on her earlier thoughts about gender in the field experience. She explained that she did not know enough to offer a definitive answer, and offered the following comment: “I actually would be interested to see other teacher candidates, how they felt about having a male or female associate. Maybe it's better to pair them with the same [gender] first, or maybe it's not. I don't know.” Indeed, as gender falls outside the scope of this study, this may be a question for further investigation.

Reflecting on age and associate teacher experience, participants were similarly mixed. As with gender, Linda identified that she did not have positive relationships with both of her associate teachers despite their similar ages. Gail was uncertain in her responses. Recalling her older associate teacher, she said “her energy is gone, her passion is gone. It becomes an act.” When asked about the influence of age, however, she suggested that while age might affect the nature of the relationship, she did not believe her associates' age was a significant factor in her field experiences. Dana only commented on age briefly, noting that she did not think Ms. Dixon, “a newer teacher,” had met her needs as a teacher candidate. Sarah's

reflections on age suggested she would appreciate the opportunity to experience both perspectives. During our conversations, she often mentioned seeking guidance from both her experienced associate teachers and other younger teachers in the school. For Sarah, this seemed to connect less to age and more to a sense of understanding. Sarah appreciated having a support who could say “Yeah, this was me 5 years ago. I know exactly what you're going through.” Sarah’s example of a younger teacher may, then, connect more directly to rapport than to age or other demographics, particularly in the context of this study.

Other relationships. Teacher candidates and their associate teachers do not interact in a bubble. Indeed, throughout our conversations, all five participants mentioned a variety of other relationships they used during the field experience to augment their relationships with their associate teachers. Participants mentioned other teachers, educational assistants, school administration, their faculty advisors, other teacher candidates, as well as various friends and family members. These relationships surround the relationship between teacher candidates and their associate teacher and, therefore, may affect candidates’ perception of their field experiences.

In most contexts, participants appreciated forming relationships with other educators in their practicum schools. Dana recalled that “other teachers would know me by name and ask ‘Hey, how are you doing?’ Or say, ‘If you need any help, feel free to come by.’” Sarah and Gail both formed relationships with grade partners—other teachers responsible for teaching the same grade level—who served as additional resources during the field experience. One of Sarah’s grade partners gave her many of his lesson plans, saying “If I can help somebody else, take it.” Participants were more likely to reflect positively on experiences where such relationships existed. Similarly, Ellen and Sarah both had frequent

interactions with school administration. Their principals observed their classrooms and, in Sarah's case, were interested in her progression after finishing her practicum at that school. Each of these relationships enhanced participants' experiences in the program.

Participants only identified one negative influence of other educators. Gail and Ellen both recalled that on the day of their evaluation, their associate teachers were absent and unable to attend. Rather than having their evaluations rescheduled, both Gail and Ellen were observed by substitute teachers. Gail explained, "that was the worst experience possible. I felt all the support I had gotten from her . . . and then to have her leave was frustrating, because now I have this teacher who I don't know [evaluating me]." Ellen, similarly, felt uncomfortable being evaluated with a stranger in the room. In these cases, replacing the associate teacher with another teacher created stress for the teacher candidates involved.

Participants often reflected on their faculty advisors peripherally, usually in reference to their role as evaluators. Sarah and Dana, however, recalled more frequent interactions with these university instructors. Sarah's response to her faculty advisors was mostly positive. Recalling their support, she said "what stands out for me most in teacher's college is the support by our faculty advisors. . . . I had some really amazing teachers who were very supportive. Always there for you, if you had questions, if you needed resources." Thus, for Sarah, these additional supports were generally successful. During the focus group, Sarah did express some frustration about her faculty advisors' willingness to offer specific, practical answers. While Sarah found her faculty advisors supportive, she tended to attribute "honest" answers to the associate teachers she was placed with during the field experience. Dana, alternatively, did not have a positive experience with some of her faculty advisors. She

recalled that the process of ending her relationship with Mrs. Davis was stressful and isolating. She described a meeting between herself, her advisor, and Mrs. Davis, saying:

I blame it on a miscommunication, yet it was never actually said – there was never any fault accepted from my associate, or my advisor, that it was a miscommunication.

Instead they blamed me, saying that I didn't understand what was expected.

Dana felt unsupported in her decision to end her relationship with Mrs. Davis and seemed to feel criticized by her faculty advisor for the “miscommunication” she and Mrs. Davis had during their relationship. While Dana already reflected negatively on this relationship, her comments about her faculty advisor seem to suggest that this intervention could have been more successful.

At times, participants mentioned the potential support that other teacher candidates could provide through the field experience. Sarah and Ellen, in particular, recalled conversations with their peers. Sarah was able to speak to other teacher candidates about her challenges and share lessons when other students reached out to her. Sarah attributed some of these successes to the program's cohort structure, where teacher candidates are grouped together in smaller cohorts for such support. Several participants acknowledged, however, that this was not a consistent experience. Gail recalled feeling bullied by several of her cohort peers, while Linda often felt isolated from other teacher candidates during the field experience. To address this challenge, Linda offered the following: “They could implement that into the 2-year program – there needs to be more contact, and more feedback and debriefing with your peers and your cohort. . . . At least two, there should be at least two [opportunities].” Recognizing the inconsistency between their experiences, Linda suggested introducing more opportunities for teacher candidates to meet with their cohort groups during

the field experience. Given Sarah's positive experience, I wonder how other teacher candidates would respond to such additional opportunities.

Interestingly, participants tended not to mention receiving extensive support from friends and family members. While Linda and Sarah both referenced support in their personal lives—their daughter and partner, respectively—most participants tended to limit their discussion of other supports to the relationships described earlier in this section. Indeed, Linda referenced feeling isolated as often as she mentioned her family support, saying “I was on my own. I had no one to talk to. We just end [our program]. We never see anybody to talk about it. Our experience is just over.” Once again, this is not the case for all teacher candidates in all programs. As Linda shared, however, her experiences in her program ended abruptly. Since most participants spoke positively of the other relationships they relied on during the field experience, this may be a missed opportunity for Linda and other teacher candidates.

Field experience length. All five participants praised experiences that allowed them to develop a relationship with their associate teacher and adjust to their students' needs. Ellen commented that “I appreciated the first experience because we had observation [for 2 months] ahead of our teaching period. Because of that we got to know the students and my associate.” In contrast, several participants commented that their later experiences did not offer as much time to develop relationships with their associate teachers. Recalling her field experience with Ms. Dixon, Dana said that she struggled to develop a strong relationship after changing associate teachers mid-practicum. Gail, similarly, commented that she and Mr. Garcia “didn't have enough time to really build a relationship. I felt it was very rushed to get to teaching.” Other participants shared similar experiences. For these participants, more time

in the field allowed them to develop stronger relationships with their associate teachers. Indeed, the two shortest experiences, with Mr. Garcia and Mr. Sullivan, are mentioned least often in participants' responses. Interestingly, however, participants described only two of the four longest-lasting relationships as positive: Ms. Sanders and Ms. Edwards were described positively, but Mrs. Gray and Ms. Lewis were not.

School atmosphere. Three participants commented that a school's atmosphere affected their perception of their field experience. The tone of the teaching staff, in particular, resonated with participants' reflections on their time in those schools. Dana recalled feeling welcome and included in her third school. She explained:

[Each week they had] salad day. So some of the teacher candidates would sign up, and we brought food in as well, and it really helped us become involved and welcomed in that environment. I think it was just the whole school atmosphere.

Dana had already formed a strong relationship with Mr. Doherty in her practicum. Her interactions with the rest of the teaching staff reinforced her perception of the field experience. Sarah, similarly, attributed much of her appreciation for her second field experience to the welcoming tone she perceived in the school. Recalling her going away party, she said "they knew that I love volleyball, and so the second half of the last day, we all went to the gym and played volleyball. . . . It was nice to see that you're part of the school." These initiatives seem to have increased Dana and Sarah's sense of belonging during their field experiences.

Just as Dana and Sarah identified positive atmospheres, participants also encountered unsupportive school climates. Linda remembered feeling uncomfortable spending time in the staff room during her first field experience. She explained that the "topics of conversation,

and choice of words [were] kind of inappropriate.” Indeed, Linda and Dana both observed staff rooms where teacher candidates were not integrated into the staff community. In both cases, Linda and Dana reflected negatively on both the school atmosphere and their relationship with their associate teacher.

Stress. When asked to summarize their experiences in the teacher education program, participants referenced stress 84 times: more often than any other concept. Indeed, while participants’ stress was not usually caused by their relationships with their associate teachers, several participants regularly recalled the stress and pressure they felt in their teacher education program and field experiences. Participants described the program as “overwhelming” and said that they felt “pushed to so many different breaking points within teaching.” Ellen suggested that much of her stress stemmed from the role of the teacher candidate, explaining,

We're expected to be very successful. There's a pressure of learning how to do assessment, learning the students, their names, the different pedagogy in the classroom. I think it's a lot to expect from new teachers, but I [can't think of] another way to do it.

While participants acknowledged that teaching is a stressful profession, they suggested teacher candidates in particular feel stressed during the field experience. Sarah argued that many established teachers “have all their lessons planned. They can go home, they don't do 5 hours of lesson planning that we do.” Dana, similarly, identified that in addition to classroom planning, teacher candidates may feel pressured academically. She said, “it was stressful because if I didn't do well, I would lose my degree. And being in concurrent education, it means that I couldn't graduate with any degree. That's a lot riding on one little thing.”

Indeed, most participants commented that they felt stress during the program because of the additional time constraints they balanced alongside their field work. Linda shared the challenge of raising a family while two other participants cited evening jobs that decreased the amount of time they could dedicate to lesson planning or maintaining life balance. For all five participants, stress featured prominently.

Gail and Linda both offered suggestions to help mitigate the stress they felt during their field experiences. Gail appreciated that her second associate teacher, Ms. Green, expected her to be prepared for lessons a day ahead, rather than 3 days in advance. She explained,

As much as you can plan out what you should be teaching days ahead, you shouldn't have all of those lessons made. . . . I think pressure should be put on making sure you are using different teaching styles . . . every day, I would say.

Gail recognized the inherently stressful nature of teacher education but suggested that pressure should be focused toward achievable goals. Linda, similarly, contended that “the number one priority is making sure you're prepared every day, with those lesson plans, and what you're going to do that day.” For Linda, this extent of preparation balanced her responsibilities as a teacher candidate with her individual health. Considering participants' strong responses to stress, I would be interested to see this aspect of the field experience explored in further detail, particularly as it relates to teacher candidates' success with their associate teachers.

Summary of the Chapter

The data explored in this chapter reveal a range of effective practices that contributed to successful field experiences and associate-candidate relationships. Highly functional

relationships incorporated the following themes: (a) frequent constructive feedback catered to participants' goals, (b) guidance in the form of suggestions and explicit modelling, (c) professional support, (d) interactions rooted in honesty and equality, and (e) ongoing interactions to build rapport and maintain open communication. Participants felt most successful when their associate teachers began the field experience with a lengthy conversation to set mutual goals and learn about one another's passions for education. While all five participants appreciated a graduate release through these relationships, they identified that shifting expectations should be explicit and reflect the goals set by both parties. Participants also suggested that associate teachers might be better supported in their role if they were offered increased professional development from the faculties of education that organize the field experience. This chapter has presented participant data organized by themes found in both the focus group and individual interviews. Chapter Five consists of the summary, discussion, and recommendations arising from the research.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The relationships that teacher candidates form with their associate teachers are central to the field experience, and yet how these relationships develop *in situ* is not well understood. As Broad and Tessaro (2010) note, “the role of the associate teacher is poorly defined and . . . often expectations are ambiguous and overlapping” (p. 80). To that end, this study was designed to explore the associate-candidate relationship as it is perceived by teacher candidates and to contribute to a greater understanding of how these relationships enable teacher candidates to succeed in their field experiences. In this study, participants were positioned as developing professionals who were able to reflect on the meanings of their experiences, reflecting Darling-Hammond and Bransford’s concept of teacher expertise (Bransford, Derry, et al., 2005) and Kosnik and Beck’s (2006) constructivist lens. To investigate the associate-candidate relationship, this instrumental multicase study included a focus group and semistructured interviews with teacher candidates who had just completed their teacher education program. Data arising from these discussions were analyzed using constant comparative analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2009) and approached using an interpretive lens (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2013). This chapter discusses the findings emerging from this analysis and offers recommendations to teacher education stakeholders and for further research. The following section explores the methods used in this study and the results arising from participants’ experiences.

Summary of the Study

This instrumental multicase study (Stake, 2006) included a qualitative focus group as well as semistructured interviews. The focus group phase was included to learn how participants perceived their relationships with associate teachers, and how the participants

themselves compared and contrasted their various experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Following the focus group phase, a semistructured interview was conducted so that new insights arising from the focus group could be discussed with each participant (Krueger, 1998a). Participants unable to attend the focus group were included in individual interviews to explore both their own experiences and their perceptions of themes arising from the focus group. In addition to the focus group and interview protocols, researcher field notes were recorded throughout the data collection process (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

The study included the experiences of five participating teacher candidates from a mid-sized university in southern Ontario. The quintain, or group of cases, included 13 pairs of relationships between participating teacher candidates and their associate teachers. Each participant experienced two or three relationships lasting between 3 weeks and 4 months. Three participants participated in the focus group and interview phases while two participated in longer modified interviews. In total, participants' responses comprised 167 pages of data.

Throughout the study, data analysis followed an emergent structure. Analysis began following the focus group, as the initial themes arising from the focus group were used to frame follow-up questions for specific individual interviews. Axial coding (Krueger, 1998a) and constant comparative analysis (Flores, 2006; Krueger & Casey, 2009) were used throughout the analysis process, so that participants' relationships could be compared with other cases in the data to better understand the nature of the associate-candidate relationship.

Participants identified a range of effective practices that contributed to successful field experiences and associate-candidate relationships. Highly functional relationships

incorporated the following themes: feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions. While relationships participants perceived poorly included some of these themes, others were missing or unsuccessfully incorporated into such experiences. Relating to feedback, participants appreciated associate teachers whose comments were constructive, positive, and linked to specific parts of their teaching. Participants preferred feedback that was framed as moving toward improvement and which motivated them to continue investing in their field experiences. Interestingly, participants seemed to view feedback as part of a broader discussion with their associate teachers, and thus appreciated frequent and timely feedback as the relationship progressed.

When discussing guidance, participants identified a variety of strategies that contributed to successful field experiences. Suggestions were the most mentioned guidance format: each of the participants felt more comfortable working with their associate teacher when the guidance they received allowed for flexibility and independence. To that end, four of the five participants wanted strong initial guidance with a gradual release toward less frequent guidance as the field experience continued. Participants wanted this release to be an explicit process. Without an explicit transition between frequent guidance and independence in the practicum, participants perceived their associate teachers' actions as a lack of guidance and a sign that their associate teachers were unwilling to help them in the field experience.

In contrast to these perceptions, participants appreciated associate teachers who supported their success in the field experience. Associate teachers who checked in on their candidates were seen as caring and invested in their candidates' goals. Participants felt safer and more confident when making decisions in classrooms where they believed their associate teacher would support their decisions and intervene to support their teaching efforts. Four

participants also received emotional support in the practicum while two participants were supported during stress-related health issues that arose in their field experiences.

Each of the 13 case relationships included unique dynamics and interactions that were particular to each associate-candidate pairing. Despite these differences, however, a significant finding was that all five participants preferred associate teachers who took time to bond with their teacher candidates in meaningful ways. Participants gained respect for associate teachers who behaved professionally and engaged them as fellow professionals. Further, every participant cited open communication as an essential part of a successful associate-candidate relationship. All participants echoed the suggestion for field experiences to include conversations geared toward mutual goal-setting, role-exploring, and rapport-building early in the relationship. While participants were divided on the degree of distance or friendliness that was appropriate in the field experience, participants preferred associate teachers who established relationships that met the needs of both the associate teacher and the teacher candidate during the field experience.

Participants consistently expected the associate-candidate relationship to be comprised of genuine interactions. Participants valued associate teachers who were honest with them, including when associate teachers provided feedback after unsuccessful lessons. Participants perceived critical, constructive feedback as evidence that their associate teachers were invested in their success as educators. Similarly, participants felt encouraged by associate teachers who demonstrated trust by offering additional opportunities within the practicum. In contrast, participants regarded dishonesty as evidence of a negative relationship with their associate teachers and as an obstacle to success in the field experience. Participants did not want an associate teacher to pretend that an unsuccessful lesson had gone well.

Further, the participants shared strong reactions to apparently negative motivations and expressed appreciation for relationships that seemed to be rooted in professional development. One participant suggested that associate teachers and teacher candidates could address these perceptions by sharing their motivations during the field experience. This connects to a consistent appreciation among participants for associate teachers who established a level playing field within their relationship.

In addition to these major themes, participants also discussed the role of the teacher candidate in the field experience as well as other factors affecting the relationship. Participants suggested that in successful relationships, teacher candidates should be active contributors who reach out to their associate teachers and who are open to receiving their associates' feedback. Beyond the associate-candidate relationship, participants reflected positively on field experiences where they developed relationships with other educators within a welcoming school atmosphere. Participants spoke positively of opportunities to rely on other support mechanisms but noted that these supports were inconsistent and not integrated into the structure of the program. Finally, participants highlighted that they experienced considerable stress during their time in the program. They suggested that associate teachers and teacher candidates could set goals for the field experience to alleviate this stress while collaborating within the field experience.

This section presented an overview of the investigation of the associate-candidate relationship as perceived by the five participating teacher candidates. Through the data collection process, participants identified feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions as central to the associate-candidate relationship. The following

section serves as a critical reflection on these themes and considers how these findings connect to previous research in teacher education.

Discussion

The findings from this study of the associate-candidate relationship extend from previous research in the literature. As suggested by Elliott-Johns and Ridler (2010) and Smits (2010), this study is intended to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. Since many studies of teacher education do not consider this perspective (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005), participants' experiences offer new insights into how the associate-candidate relationship may lead to effective teacher education (Foster et al., 2010; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008). This section, therefore, discusses these findings and their relationship to previous research, particularly in an effort to further an understanding of effective teacher education and the substance of exemplary associate-candidate relationships (Borko et al., 2008; Zeichner & Conklin, 2008).

Feedback

Feedback is an essential part of the associate-candidate relationship (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010). Accordingly, I sought to unpack the specific forms of feedback participants found helpful in their field experiences. Participants identified performance feedback as evidence of a strong relationship with their associate teachers. As with Broad and Tessaro's (2010) candidates, participants valued associate teachers who offered positive feedback that was directly related to their teaching efforts. Similarly, participants disliked associate teachers whose feedback compared their work to other teacher candidates' efforts. This dislike for comparison, while not noted in the literature, reflects Aitken and Kreuger's

recommendation that feedback should be focused on the specific teacher candidate's development. Indeed, all five participants sought constructive feedback—feedback designed to improve their teaching abilities—when working with their associate teachers. Kosnik and Beck (2002) note that meaningful feedback includes constructive criticisms “presented in a collegial spirit, with opportunity for genuine dialogue about the matters in question” (p. 93). Such constructive feedback echoes Dillon and O'Connor's (2010) notion that field experiences should foster students' skills in making sense of their teaching and improve upon past practice. Offering constructive criticism when providing feedback reflects what Noddings and Slote (2003) describe as “a situationally induced recognition . . . [that] bad things will happen . . . if we don't act in a helpful way”(p. 345). That is, while constructive feedback necessarily includes a critique of the teacher candidate's efforts, such feedback is intended to help teacher candidates develop and overcome weaknesses in their practice.

Several participants shared that thorough feedback allowed them to consider how they might adjust their teaching as the field experience continued. Broad and Tessaro (2010) contend that such feedback discussions are key to teacher candidates' abilities to develop a clear understanding of their work in the profession. Indeed, regardless of the quality of the relationship between participants and their associate teachers, participants appreciated when they were given the opportunity to reflect upon their performance. Opportunities for reflection encourage teacher candidates to assess their own work (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010; Dillon & O'Connor, 2010) and may allow teacher candidates to move beyond their own assumptions about the profession (Falkenberg, 2010). Participants recalled that when they reflected on their performance with their associate teachers, they were often more willing to invest in the field experience and move past difficulties. Consistently, participants responded

to these constructive and reflective feedback practices more positively than to the “direction-giving instructions” Broad and Tessaro describe as more common in field experience placements (p. 80).

Interestingly, the type of feedback participants mentioned most often—positive recognition—is not often explored in teacher education literature. Participants wanted to be recognized for the work they did in the practicum. When participants felt recognized, they understood that what they were doing was valued and were encouraged to reinvest in their field experiences. Participants’ descriptions are somewhat related to Broad and Tessaro’s (2010) notion of “positive and encouraging” associate teachers (p. 85) and to Rideout and Koot’s (2009) “positive relationships” (p. 928), though these descriptions are not as specific as participants’ examples of positive recognition. Martin and Russell (2010) also discuss recognition, indirectly. They suggest that associate teachers should acknowledge teacher candidates’ existing knowledge to better work with teacher candidates in the field experience. This connects somewhat to participants’ experiences: participants reflected positively on associate teachers who recognized their skill sets and made that recognition explicit. These positive reinforcements were well received by participants even when they rated the overall field experience poorly.

In addition to describing the types of feedback they found most helpful, participants also spoke to the frequency and timing of effective feedback. Tatum and McWhorter (1999) warn that infrequent feedback may exacerbate a teacher candidate’s struggles in the field experience. Several participants received infrequent feedback before discovering that they were not meeting expectations and needed to adjust their performance in order to do well in the program. While some participants were comfortable with infrequent feedback when they

believed they were doing well, participants consistently preferred frequent feedback if they doubted their performance or their relationship with their associate teachers. This is consistent with Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) recommendation for frequent feedback in the field experience. Reflecting Falkenberg's (2010) suggestion of initiating such discussions early on, participants particularly appreciated associate teachers who began this process of frequent feedback early in the field experience. These associate teachers usually developed positive relationships with their teacher candidates and seemed to contribute to participants' success in the program.

As Kosnik and Beck (2006) note, participants also praised associate teachers who provided enough time for them to consider the feedback they received. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on their performance at the end of the day and deeply disliked receiving feedback immediately before teaching or at the end of the field experience, when there was no longer time to reflect or act on their associates' feedback. Indeed, Kosnik and Beck (2006, 2009) advocate that teacher candidates should be given time to reflect on and question the information they receive. While participants spoke positively of both written and verbal feedback, participants were better able to reflect on written feedback they received from their associate teachers, especially when that feedback was written on actual lesson plans or in ongoing dialogue journals. These methods may speak to Aitken and Kreuger's (2010) suggestion that associate teachers would benefit from an increased understanding of how to use written feedback more effectively. Indeed, as Hobson et al. (2009) note, while some of the associate teachers participants worked with provided effective feedback, several did not use feedback strategies that contributed to participants' pedagogical development.

Thus, these findings may be of benefit to other associate teachers hoping to refine the feedback they offer to future teacher candidates.

Guidance

Guidance is described using many terms in teacher education literature. Associate teachers are referred to variously as mentor teachers (Tatum & McWhorter, 1999), coaching experts (Dillon & O'Connor, 2010), and as guides (Aitken & Kreuger, 2010). Consistently, associate teachers are expected to guide their teacher candidates through the field experience and help them to develop as professionals (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005; Falkenberg, 2010). Indeed, participants often reflected on their relationships with their associate teachers in terms of the different guidance strategies they encountered. As Falkenberg (2010) suggests, participants most valued field experiences where their associate teachers were prepared and willing to guide them. Further, participants echoed Hobson et al. (2009) in their critique that effective teachers are not necessarily effective associates if they are not properly prepared. Instead, participants preferred associate teachers who were able to use a variety of strategies to guide them in their teaching during the field experience.

Throughout their responses, participants mentioned suggestions as the most preferred method of guidance. Participants consistently appreciated associate teachers who provided input in the form of optional suggestions. This reflects Nielsen et al.'s (2010) notion that while effective associate teachers must provide guidance, this guidance should also allow flexibility for teacher candidates. As Rideout and Koot (2009) suggest, participants reflected more positively on field experiences when their associate teachers acknowledged that these suggestions were not the only way to deliver a lesson. Participants often recalled associate teachers who phrased suggestions in terms of "this student's" or "this classroom's" needs.

That is, while the associate teacher suggested a specific course of action, they acknowledged that other strategies might be useful in other situations. These suggestions allowed participants to decide if they would accept their associate teachers' guidance. Teacher education literature (Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Lemisko & Ward, 2010) similarly emphasizes that teacher candidates need to make professional choices during the field experience. These choices allow teacher candidates to develop as professionals who are able to make decisions that necessarily differ from their associate teachers' preferences (Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). Importantly, however, suggestions alone did not seem to lead to participants developing independent pedagogies. While some participants adapted suggestions to meet their teaching styles, others did not. This reflects Kosnik and Beck's (2009) concern that teacher candidates are not prepared sufficiently or encouraged to use their discretion during their field experiences.

Extending from this challenge of professional discretion, participants regularly discussed effective guidance as a shift toward independence. Four of five participants wanted strong initial guidance with progressively less guidance as the practicum continued. Particularly during their first field experiences, participants appreciated high levels of guidance. This finding supports Rideout and Koot's (2009) argument that teacher candidates who do not receive sufficient guidance feel overwhelmed and unprepared to enter the profession. Indeed, as Kosnik and Beck (2009) note, participants did not appreciate field experiences when they were left on their own to design lessons without their associate teachers' input. Instead, participants echoed Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) suggestion that teacher candidates should take on increased responsibility throughout the field experience. While participants appreciated opportunities to teach independently in the

classroom, they tended to reflect positively on this independence if their associate teacher began the field experience with strong guidance and a gradual release of responsibility. Interestingly, participants wanted this release to be an explicit process—a concept that is not emphasized in the literature. Without an explicit transition during the release process, participants felt disconnected from their associate teachers and shared that they did not know what was expected of them in the practicum. This finding may add some clarity to Foster et al.'s (2010) observation that the guidance process in teacher education is often unclear in its implementation.

In addition to gradual release and suggestion strategies, participants appreciated associate teachers who engaged in co-planning and modelled teaching methods in the classroom. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) and Elliott-Johns and Ridler (2010) note similarly that effective associate teachers offer guidance during the planning process and model strategies for teacher candidates to introduce them to new approaches. According to Haberman and Post (2008), beginning teachers connect modelling with credible mentorship. Indeed, participants reflected more positively on associate teachers who modelled strategies than those who did not. Participants particularly benefited from associate teachers who would explain strategies directly before or after the modelling took place. As Zeichner and Conklin (2008) note, teacher candidates benefit from discussing instruction with other educators. By linking modelling with this direct discussion, participants' associate teachers were able to improve the quality of guidance they offered during the field experience.

In order to implement these guidance strategies, associate teachers must supervise teacher candidates while they are teaching. Importantly, however, when supervision is mentioned in the literature, it is linked with both the associate-candidate relationship and

with the guidance strategies associate teachers enact (Clift & Brady, 2005; Falkenberg, 2010; Foster et al., 2010). That is, supervision alone does not provide teacher candidates with a meaningful learning experience. Participants' responses to supervision were particularly mixed. Participants appreciated having a familiar presence in the room for classroom management support, but sometimes felt intimidated by associate teachers who they worried were scrutinizing their work. This links with Clift and Brady's suggestion that associate teachers must move beyond supervising to engage in direct discussion and guidance. As Foster et al. note, participants were more comfortable when they had formed a meaningful relationship with the associate teachers supervising them. Thus, while supervision is essential to the field experience, participants' mixed response to being supervised may offer some insights to associate teachers seeking to refine how they guide teacher candidates in their classrooms.

Support

Schulz (2005) contends that while teacher education programs are primarily designed to prepare teacher candidates for entry into the profession, support is also essential for effective teacher development. Similarly, Kosnik and Beck (2002) suggest that associate teachers should support teacher candidates as they develop the associate-candidate relationship. While some participants needed less support than others, all five appreciated associate teachers who supported their efforts in the field experience. Just as Flores' (2006) beginning teachers appreciated mentors who had a "helping attitude" (p. 39), associate teachers who checked in on their teacher candidates were seen as caring and invested in the participants' success. As Hobson et al. (2009) noted, mentors who do not provide emotional and psychological support are perceived as unavailable and uncaring. Participants, similarly,

reacted negatively to associate teachers who did not seem to care about them as individuals. This is consistent with Noddings' (1984) notion of care in education. For Noddings (1984), nothing is "quite as important or influential as the attitude of [a caring educator]" (p. 19). As Noddings suggests, participants reflected more positively on minor acts done with care than they did on major acts done without care. Emotional support is central to these perceptions. For Zeichner and Conklin (2008), emotional support is a key indicator of an effective teacher education program. Four of the five participants mentioned receiving emotional support and reassurance from their associate teachers during the practicum. Moreover, two participants encountered stress-related health issues during their field experiences. Both spoke positively of their associate teachers at the time, who recognized their candidates' difficulties and developed strategies to address them. Consistently, participants echoed findings in the literature that link emotional support and care with effective mentorship practices (Hobson et al., 2009).

Importantly, participants also acknowledged that associate teachers could demonstrate care by providing feedback or guidance that they might not want to hear. As discussed earlier in this chapter, participants saw constructive feedback as evidence of their associate teachers' commitment to their growth as educators. Kosnik and Beck (2002) acknowledge that associate teachers may struggle with providing meaningful feedback while still demonstrating care for their teacher candidates. As Kitchen (2005a) notes, however, associate teachers must both respect their teacher candidates and help them to address challenges in their practice as educators. Similarly, associate teachers are able to support teacher candidates while offering critiques of their efforts in the classroom (Kitchen, 2005b).

Bridging the concepts of professional preparation and support, participants most often described associate teachers providing classroom and instructional support. Zeichner and Conklin (2008) describe this instructional support as linked to issues of teaching and learning. Indeed, participants valued associate teachers who supported the decision they made in the classroom and who encouraged them to discover their own teaching preferences. As Bullock and Russell (2010) note, teacher candidates are more successful with associate teachers who support candidates as they explore the profession. Participants similarly appreciated associate teachers who did not expect them to teach in isolation, especially when struggling. These findings connect to Tatum and McWhorter's (1999) recognition that teacher candidates will struggle to succeed if they are not supported in developing and delivering lessons. Extending from this, participants clarified that they appreciated associate teachers who intervened during situations that adversely affected either student learning or the candidate's success in the field experience. These interventions—focused on helping the teacher candidate succeed—offer some clarity to the types of support that participants most appreciated during their field experiences.

Relationship Dynamics

As explored in previous sections, associate teachers provide their teacher candidates with feedback, guidance, and support. Extending from these strategies, however, associate teachers also develop relationships with the teacher candidates in their classrooms. Relationship dynamics describe the sorts of relationships formed between teacher candidates and their associate teachers as well as the factors that influence those relationships. Volante (2006) and Broad and Tessaro (2010) note that these relationships are a significant factor in teacher candidates' successes in the field experience. Indeed, Graham, Hudson-Ross, Adkins,

McWhorter, and Stewart (1999) contend that the associate-candidate relationship is “the most fragile” pairing in teacher education programs (p. 19). This study of the associate-candidate relationship was therefore designed to further understand what dynamics were helpful in developing effective relationships in the field experience. When describing the relationships they built, participants discussed personal bond and rapport most frequently. Participants wanted to get to know their associate teachers as individuals and as professionals. This reflects what Clift and Brady (2005) and Zeichner and Conklin (2008) refer to as “collegial relationships” (p. 316; p. 275). Participants were divided in their beliefs on how close such rapports should be. Interestingly, participants’ preferred degrees of rapport seemed to echo Broad and Tessaro’s notion that associate teachers must play many roles during the field experience. While one participant preferred a friendly relationship, another preferred an almost exclusively professional relationship. Regardless of the depth of their personal bonds, however, all five participants preferred associate teachers who took time to bond with their teacher candidates in meaningful ways. This emphasis on developing connections is consistent with Clift and Brady’s notion that the associate-candidate relationship develops slowly over time and that, therefore, rapport-building should be an ongoing process (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2006).

While participants appreciated bonding with their associate teachers, they also explained that they built relationships through pedagogical discussions. Unlike when receiving feedback or guidance, where the purpose was to develop the candidates’ abilities, these interactions focused on the bond associate teachers formed with the participants as colleagues within the profession. As Hobson et al. (2009) note, such conversations help associate teachers to understand new teachers’ professional perspectives. Similarly,

participants found that discussing pedagogy supported their ability to reach their students effectively. This is consistent with Schulz's (2005) claim that field experiences are successful only if they help teacher candidates teach students. When participants did not discuss pedagogy with their associate teachers, their relationships suffered. Clift and Brady (2005) similarly describe that teacher candidates who are not engaged as educators become "angry and [feel] isolated" in the field experience (p. 316). Thus, participants' preference for pedagogical discussions seems to be consistent with existing research in the literature.

Participants tended to form positive relationships with associate teachers who shared their pedagogical perspective. In the one case where a participant formed a positive relationship despite pedagogical differences, the participant still identified common professional values. Participants believed these shared pedagogies allowed them to, as Crocker and Dibbon (2008) describe, develop "a common vision for teacher education" within their pairing (p. x). Further, participants explained that such conversations were useful when addressing challenges in their classrooms. Thus, associate teachers who encouraged participants' developing pedagogies seem to support Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) expectation that teachers must use a range of problem-solving strategies to meet students' needs. This apparent preference for a shared outlook on teaching is consistent with Hudson's (2013) observation that tensions develop when teacher candidates and their associate teachers perceive the profession differently. As Volante and Earl (2002) describe, teacher candidates are critical of field experiences where their pedagogical views differ from their associate teachers'. Indeed, three participants expressed frustration with field experiences where their associate teacher held different professional beliefs. In line with Clift and Brady's (2005) findings, none of the participants who encountered these disparate

pedagogies approached their associate teachers to discuss the issue. Given the importance of the associate-candidate relationship (Foster et al., 2010), these pedagogical challenges seem significant to participants' perceptions of a positive field experience.

Relating to professional values, participants appreciated associate teachers who demonstrated professionalism and welcomed them as fellow teachers within the school community. Participants reflected positively on associate teachers who referred to them by their first names outside of the classroom and who introduced them to staff and students. This is consistent with Tatum and McWhorter's (1999) finding that participants bonded with associate teachers who treated them as equals rather than as students. Participants also spoke to an aspect of relational professionalism not explored in the literature: associate teachers' behaviour. Participants gained respect for associate teachers who showed professionalism, recalling feeling valued and motivated. When participants encountered unprofessional behaviour, their relationships invariably suffered. Referencing the standards of the profession (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013), participants deeply disliked unprofessional behaviour, especially verbal comments about students or the role of the associate teacher. Thus, as with pedagogical views, participants formed positive relationships with associate teachers who seemed to hold professional values that were similar to their own.

Perhaps the most versatile factor in participants' relationship experiences is open communication. Open communication was mentioned by every participant and linked with every major theme. Similarly, Hudson (2013) and Rideout and Koot (2009) contend that open communication is an important part of an effective associate-candidate relationship. Participants appreciated associate teachers they could approach at any time to discuss feedback, guidance, or support issues. Indeed, participants viewed ongoing discussions as

evidence of an effective associate-candidate relationship. Hobson et al. (2009) likewise note that effective mentors structure their interactions to support open, ongoing conversations. Mulholland et al. (2010) suggest that the associate-candidate relationship should be “typified by open, clear, direct, non-binding communications” (p. 319). To that end, participants expected associate teachers to explain their role as an associate teacher and how they would enact that role in their classroom. Recognizing that effective communication strategies occurred over time (Clift & Brady, 2005), participants suggested that this process should start at the beginning of the field experience. All participants echoed the suggestion to include initial conversations geared toward mutual goal-setting, role-exploring, and rapport-building early in the relationship. Given the individualized needs of both teacher candidates and their associate teachers, setting specific goals for both the teacher candidates’ practice and the associate teachers’ guidance may contribute to Crocker and Dibbon’s (2008) call for improved support for teacher candidates in the field experience.

While participants sought open communication and a strong rapport with their associate teachers, participants also recognized that a certain amount of distance is necessary and appropriate in the field experience. This reflects Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates’ (2010) observation that associate teachers face a variety of challenges when determining how much support and communication are necessary for their teacher candidates. Similarly, Hobson et al. (2009) recognize that effective mentors provide autonomy for new teachers as they adjust to the profession. In the context of teacher education, participants recognized that some teacher candidates might prefer more distance than others. Indeed, one participant recalled a positive associate-candidate relationship even though her associate teacher was rarely in the classroom. Further reflecting Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates’ challenges, however, each

participant who experienced a negative relationship mentioned distance as an obstacle to feeling successful in the field experience. This suggests that the concept of distant relationships is more nuanced than it may seem, particularly as it relates to other themes associated with developing relationships in the field experience.

Genuine Interactions

Genuine interactions are those experiences participants described which related to concepts of honesty, trust, and perception. As with findings involving relationship dynamics, participants' perceptions of genuine interactions contributed to their overall evaluation of the field experience. Curiously, while much research in teacher education recognizes the significance of the associate-candidate relationship, few studies emphasize honesty to the extent encountered in this study. Participants valued associate teachers who were honest with them and were particularly critical of dishonesty. This preference for honesty included a desire for genuine feedback after unsuccessful lessons. As Tatum and McWhorter (1999) note, teacher candidates respect associate teachers who are willing to provide this honest, constructive feedback. Similarly, participants appreciated associate teachers who seemed to trust them as educators. When associate teachers expressed confidence in the participants' abilities or provided opportunities to become more involved, participants reflected positively and felt trusted. Two participants further identified the importance of being able to trust their associate teacher. Thus, participants' desire for trust reflects Tatum and McWhorter's suggestion that effective associate-candidate relationships should be grounded in trust. Despite these findings, however, participants did not perceive trust consistently. Different participants perceived similar associate teacher behaviours as both evidence for and against

trust; therefore, while trust seems essential to an effective field experience, its development remains unclear.

Perception played an ongoing role in participants' associate-candidate relationships. As noted in previous studies (Bullock & Russell, 2010; Volante & Earl, 2002), participants recognized that being perceived in a positive light was necessary to a successful field experience evaluation. Participants, however, also described their own perceptions of their associate teachers, particularly when describing perceived motivations. Participants sought associate teachers who seemed invested in their development as educators. This is somewhat reflected in Schulz's (2005) notion that teacher candidates should be engaged as new educators who might be able to enhance associate teachers' practices. Indeed, participants expressed appreciation for relationships that seemed to be rooted in such professional development. In contrast, participants shared strong reactions to seemingly negative motivations, sometimes suggesting that an associate teacher was in the role for "the wrong reasons." This reflects Darling-Hammond and Bransford's (2005) contention that field experiences are most effective when all stakeholders—including teacher candidates and associate teachers—have a consistent understanding of the practicum's goals and purposes. Indeed, one participant suggested circumventing such negative perceptions by rendering stakeholders' motivations explicit. She encouraged teacher candidates and associate teachers to discuss their passions in education so that their motivations for the field experience could be clear to both parties. This suggestion is consistent with Lemisko and Ward's (2010) goal of establishing "authentic partnerships" within the field experience (p. 252).

Extending from this sense of partnership, four participants shared experiences that related to the idea of a level playing field between associate teachers and their teacher

candidates. As Aitken and Kreuger (2010) note, teacher candidates want their associate teachers to view the field experience as an equal relationship. Reflecting their desire for a professional relationship, participants wanted to be included in conversations, to be elevated as educators in front of students and other teachers, and to not feel inferior to their associate teacher. This equality reflects Schulz's (2005) notion of collaboration and is consistent with previous teacher candidates' desires for an equal relationship during the field experience. (Tatum & McWhorter, 1999). Thus, as with the other major themes in this study, participants believed that equal, genuine interactions would contribute to a stronger associate-candidate relationship and a successful field experience.

Role of the Teacher Candidate

This study of associate-candidate relationships necessarily includes a consideration of the role of the teacher candidate. Participants acknowledged that as teacher candidates they needed to contribute to the success of their field experiences. Hudson (2013) provides a precedence for emphasizing teacher candidates' duties in his study of mentors' expectations of their mentees. Indeed, participants understood that they needed to engage their associate teachers to develop meaningful relationships, and should reach out to their associate teachers if their needs were not being met. This is consistent with Schulz's (2005) suggestion that new teachers should be leaders who are actively engaged in the goal-setting process. Similarly, Bullough (1990) notes that successful teaching experiences require beginning teachers to have a clear understanding of their role as educators. Even when receiving positive evaluations, new teachers may not take on an effective role in the classroom without their mentors' guidance in developing an identity within the profession (Bullough, 1990). When asked how they might change their relationships with their associate teachers, all five

participants said that they would want to reach out more often to build stronger relationships, receive more effective feedback, and be given more guidance in the practicum. As Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates (2010) note, however, this self-advocacy is a challenging process.

Participants were reluctant to reach out to associates they did not have a strong relationship with, fearing that they would be rebuffed or receive a poor evaluation. Thus, while these findings suggest teacher candidates should be encouraged to reach out to their associate teachers, the scope of this study does not include strategies for effectively addressing the power differentials identified by Chudleigh and Gibson-Gates.

Despite these challenges, participants recognized the field experience as a learning experience where they are not yet fully practicing teachers. To that end, participants understood the need for teacher candidates to be open to feedback during the field experience. This is consistent with Hudson's (2013) finding that associate teachers prefer teacher candidates who are confident listeners. Importantly, however, some participants found this openness challenging. Participants appreciated the opportunity to learn and make mistakes within the field experience, but sometimes struggled when receiving feedback related to unsuccessful interactions in the classroom. This reflects Tatum and McWhorter's (1999) recognition that teacher candidates are expected to play the part of confident teachers when they are still officially students. Recalling the concepts of honesty and support, however, participants seemed to appreciate field experiences where they were open to feedback delivered in a constructive, supportive manner. This interlacing of themes may speak to how associate teachers and teacher candidates might work together to facilitate the feedback process more effectively. While the role of the teacher candidate can be a

challenging one, it is understandably essential to the development of an effective associate-candidate relationship.

Other Factors Affecting the Relationship

While the associate-candidate relationship is an important part of teacher education programs, participants acknowledged that other factors also influenced their experiences with their associate teachers. In both positive and negative relationships, participants reflected positively on the opportunity to form connections with other educators in the field experience. As Elliott-Johns and Ridler (2010) observe, teacher education programs are enhanced when teacher candidates are able to work with many individuals in a variety of contexts. Further, participants who experienced these relationships had the opportunity to refine their practices as advocated by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2006). Thus, such relationships improved participants' perception of the field experience. As participants noted, however, these supports were inconsistent and not integrated into the teacher education program. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) therefore recommend that teacher education programs should help teacher candidates develop within "collaborative communities" (p. 5). Indeed, some participants supported the goal of including teacher candidates in professional learning communities already established in some schools. Similarly, participants associated a welcoming school atmosphere with a positive field experience. McDiarmid and Clevenger-Bright (2008) contend that teachers develop within such communities, and that therefore the interactions new teachers have will affect the nature of their experiences. Participants echoed these claims, noting that they felt isolated and unsupported when not integrated into a school's culture. This is consistent with Zeichner and

Conklin's (2008) finding that teacher candidates learned more when placed in schools that supported teacher candidates and the field experience as a whole.

Participants in this study experienced practicums lasting between 3 weeks and 4 months. In one case, a participant recalled teaching for only 8 days. While participants tended to recall more positive strategies from longer field experiences, participants were not more likely to describe longer experiences as more positive or more successful. Thus, while the length of the field experience seems to influence participants' reflections, it does not seem to be the main measure of an effective field experience. This is consistent with Zeichner and Conklin's (2008) contention that a teacher education program's effectiveness is rooted in program substance, not structure or length.

Stress is the most mentioned extra-relational factor found in this study of associate-candidate relationships. Participants' experiences in the program seem to have involved considerable stress. Indeed, two participants cited individual health issues that arose as a result of stress in the field experience. Bullock and Russell (2010) similarly note that "the stress of everyday teaching" regularly affects teacher candidates' success in the field experience (p. 96). Further, Kosnik and Beck (2009) observe that teacher candidates are not able to effectively accomplish everything expected of them as they enter the profession. These pressures challenged participants and sometimes hindered their relationships with their associate teachers. To address these issues, two participants suggested that teacher candidates and associate teachers should agree to achievable goals for preparation within the practicum. While individual degrees of stress and preparedness will vary, this joint consideration reflects the collaborative conversations explored elsewhere in this study's findings.

As this discussion has explored, participants' experiences contribute to an ongoing investigation of the associate-candidate relationship in the literature. These findings reflect participants' perceptions of this relationship and attempt to further understand what Rideout and Koot (2009) refer to as the "idiosyncratic nature of the [associate-candidate] relationship" (p. 935). This consideration of participants' experiences reflects Goodwin and Oyler's (2008) observation that research in teacher education should examine how teacher candidates actually experience their teacher education programs. To that end, the following section includes specific recommendations based on the findings of this study. These recommendations are intended both for future research and for specific stakeholder groups involved in field experiences and teacher education programs.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. The primary research question of this study was: From the perspective of teacher candidates, what makes an effective associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship? Accordingly, this section outlines recommendations for developing such effective relationships, both from a practical and a research perspective. These recommendations arise from the study's findings and the participating teacher candidates' experiences. I invite readers to consider these recommendations and reflect on how they might contribute to exemplary teacher education. While qualitative research does not aim to generalize to all individuals in all contexts (Toma, 2006), these recommendations may be of value to teacher educators seeking to support the development of effective field experiences in teacher education programs.

Recommendations for Associate Teachers

As the providers of the feedback, guidance, and support that participating teacher candidates sought, associate teachers are among the best positioned educators for improving the associate-candidate relationship. Above all, associate teachers should reflect on their practice as teacher educators in relation to the themes found in this study. They should consider: How do they see themselves as a teacher educator and as a mentor of developing teacher candidates? What are their perspectives on feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions with the teacher candidates entering their classrooms? As the participants suggested, they should consider why they agreed to take on a teacher candidate and how they might best meet that candidate's needs. This preliminary reflection may help associate teachers to better understand their own practices as teacher educators.

At the beginning of the field experience, associate teachers should engage teacher candidates in conversations to develop rapport, learn about one another's passions and motivations for the profession, and set specific, mutual goals for the practicum. These goals should be explicit, specific, and measurable so that both the teacher candidate and the associate teacher may contribute to the success of their relationship.

Associate teachers should provide frequent, constructive feedback that is catered to teacher candidates' needs and is intended to improve teacher candidates' abilities to teach students effectively. Feedback should be honest and detailed, and offered when candidates have time to discuss strategies with their associate teacher and reflect on what they have heard. Associate teachers should provide critical feedback when necessary, but should avoid negative feedback such as comments not linked to specific behaviours or comparisons to peers. Similarly, associate teachers should recognize teacher candidates who are doing well.

Such recognition should focus on what teacher candidates are doing well, rather than on how they compare to other educators. Teacher candidates who do not receive such recognition may doubt their performance when they should be focusing on engaging students effectively. Associate teachers should consider a combination of written and verbal feedback. Verbal feedback seemed to encourage participating teacher candidates while written feedback seemed valuable for reflection. Such reflection should be encouraged throughout the field experience. As the field experience continues, associate teachers should continue to offer feedback. If a candidate no longer needs feedback, they should be told so explicitly.

Teacher candidates should be guided through the field experience using a variety of strategies. For example, associate teachers might employ co-planning and modelling, offer anecdotal stories, provide examples of effective methods, and give nonbinding suggestions. Such strategies should allow for independence and flexibility, and should be identified as guidance. Associate teachers should encourage teacher candidates to come to them for guidance, especially if they are struggling or seem uncertain with lessons or classroom management. Associate teachers would do well to uncover how much guidance a teacher candidate needs or desires. The gradual release of responsibility to the teacher candidate should be a mutually agreed upon process. Where possible, associate teachers should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to take on extra roles in the practicum, both within the classroom and in the broader school community.

Throughout the associate-candidate relationship, associate teachers should support teacher candidates as developing professionals and individual learners. Participating teacher candidates felt particularly stressed during the teacher education program and appreciated associate teachers who worked to alleviate such stress. When appropriate, associate teachers

should demonstrate care for teacher candidates. This can be achieved by respecting the teacher candidate as an educator who may be able to contribute to the associate teacher's own professional development. Further, associate teachers may create a welcoming atmosphere where the candidate feels safe as a member of the school community. To that end, associate teachers should consider how other educators might help support the teacher candidate. This may also help support teacher candidates who do not have strong relationships with their associate teachers. Associate teachers should check in with teacher candidates, both on their work and on their overall wellbeing. They may provide classroom support during unsuccessful lessons and when student behaviour interferes with the success of the teacher candidate's efforts. Further, associate teachers could consider establishing that the field experience is a "safe place" to make mistakes before fully entering the profession. As a final support mechanism, associate teachers should recognize when teacher candidates are in need of emotional support or experience health issues that may interfere with their field experience.

As much as possible, associate teachers should attempt to develop a rapport with teacher candidates. These rapports will necessarily be specific to associate-candidate pairings. As individuals, associate teachers might consider how they will interact with their teacher candidates when not guiding them or providing feedback. For example, what will they discuss outside of teaching? Are there opportunities for humour, or perhaps mutual interests? Associate teachers should engage teacher candidates as developing professionals. Where appropriate, teacher candidates should be included in professional conversations and treated as part of a teaching team. To that end, associate teachers should demonstrate professionalism. Negative or unprofessional comments may obstruct the associate-candidate

relationship if a strong rapport has not been established. Associate teachers should discuss pedagogy with teacher candidates. They might ask: What is your philosophy of education? How is it similar to the teacher candidate's? How might you work together to meet students' needs? Such questions may help associate teachers develop a common vision for the field experience. Throughout, associate teachers should maintain open communication. Teacher candidates may be open to communicating via email or text message outside of the classroom. With this in mind, associate teachers should consider how much distance they want to maintain in the associate-candidate relationship. This may include whether or not the associate is comfortable being "friends" with their teacher candidates, as well as how much they discuss their life outside of the classroom.

In all of their interactions, associate teachers should be honest. This includes providing honest feedback, even if a teacher candidate is not performing well. Participants appreciated knowing when they were struggling and what their associate teachers wanted them to do to address the issue. If associate teachers cannot develop a meaningful rapport or recognize a candidate's efforts genuinely, they should not pretend to do so. Participants consistently preferred distant professional relationships to disingenuous interactions during the practicum. As much as possible, associate teachers should trust teacher candidates and demonstrate that they themselves may be trusted as a resource. Perceptions should be addressed early on in the field experience. Many of participants' negative experiences were rooted in their perception of issues that were not discussed. In these interactions, associate teachers should create a level playing field with the teacher candidates, letting them know that the associate-candidate relationship is a collegial pairing, and that the teacher candidate's professional investment is valued.

Recommendations for Teacher Candidates

Teacher candidates are the reason for the associate-candidate relationship and the field experience itself. Without their input, these relationships cannot succeed. To that end, associate teachers should not be expected to develop these relationships in isolation. Teacher candidates therefore should consider their own perceptions of issues of feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions to better understand their own needs within the field experience. In this way, teacher candidates should actively contribute to all aspects of this relationship. They would be best served by clearly identifying their own learning needs early in the field experience. In particular, they should articulate how much feedback, guidance, and support would help them to succeed as developing professionals. Teacher candidates should also be open to their associate teachers' needs, recognizing the challenges of forming an equitable relationship with someone in a supervisory position. Similarly, teacher candidates should be open to receiving feedback and guidance that may critique their teaching. Such mentorship should be geared toward improving them as educators and therefore is worth consideration. If the associate-candidate relationship is not developing well, teacher candidates should reach out to their associate teacher or other educators. The field experience exists for teacher candidates and as such they should identify when their own needs are not being met. Importantly, teacher candidates should consider the field experience as opportunity to learn and make mistakes. They should reflect on their needs as those needs change, including as they begin new field experiences with new associate teacher relationships.

Recommendations for Teacher Educators and Teacher Education Programs

In Ontario, field experiences are organized exclusively through teacher education programs at the university level. Teacher education programs employ faculty advisors, instructors, and other teacher educators who influence teacher candidate development. Thus, while not directly involved in the associate-candidate relationship, teacher educators would do well to consider their role in supporting the development of effective field experiences. They should explain, in detail, the role of the associate teacher to their teacher candidates. Teacher candidates should understand what to expect in a teacher education program and what an effective associate-candidate relationship looks like in that context. Similarly, teacher education programs should explain these roles to associate teachers. Associate teachers should know what is expected of them and, importantly, how they might provide feedback, guidance, and support in ways consistent with a program's goals and visions. Accordingly, teacher educators should consider: What do they expect their associate teachers to do, and what models are available for associate teachers who would like to develop better mentorship skills? How will associate teachers be made aware of these expectations? Are current expectations and communication models working as intended? How might they be improved? Teacher education programs should offer professional development for associate teachers that is consistent with these aims. If associate teachers are expected to mentor and evaluate teacher candidates, they should be trained as teacher educators and given opportunities to develop their skills. To that end, teacher education programs should support associate teachers in their role as gatekeepers in the profession. Teacher educators should consider how associate teachers are gatekeepers in their programs and what agency and resources might be made available to them.

These considerations seem particularly important given the challenges associated with selecting and preparing associate teachers. As Goodwin and Oyler (2008) note, associate teachers are often not provided with the tools they need to act as gatekeepers to the profession. While teacher candidates have long echoed participants' suggestions that associate teachers be selected and trained (Tisher & Wideen, 1990), not all teacher education programs are equipped to meet the logistical challenges of recruiting, selecting, and training associate teachers. Some institutions, however, have successfully integrated such considerations into their teacher education programs. The University of Alberta has included associate teacher training programs in the past (Tisher & Wideen, 1990), and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) also offers "professional development opportunities for associate teachers" (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010, p. 109). Similarly, in some teacher education programs, associate teachers are empowered as the final decision maker regarding a teacher candidate's success or failure in the field experience (Chudleigh & Gibson-Gates, 2010). Given the importance of the associate teacher in the field experience, teacher educators would do well to consider how they might enhance associate teachers' mentoring and gatekeeping abilities in the field experience.

Teacher educators should also consider what support mechanisms could be implemented to better support all teacher candidates within a given program. They should ask; How will teacher candidates be supported to advocate for their own needs, especially when associate teachers and faculty advisors are in supervisory, evaluative positions over them? For example, should teacher candidates be expected to recognize their own abilities, needs, and limitations as evidence of professional awareness? If so, how might this be fostered? Likewise, teacher educators should consider their role when an associate-candidate

relationship is unsuccessful. What will be done? How will both parties be supported? At what point will such relationships be terminated?

To reflect the immersive nature of the field experience, teacher educators should consider integrating teacher candidates into peer support networks (e.g., the cohort model), particularly those that include support mechanisms during the field experience itself. Kosnik and Beck (2006) describe that cohort models may contribute to teacher candidates' abilities to integrate their experiences with the support of their peers and teacher educators. Cantalini-Williams et al. (2014) similarly describe a teacher education program where teacher candidates are paired with peer mentors. Such mentors attempt to enhance the mentees' "support, collaboration, and cooperative teach skills" throughout the field experience (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2014, p. 8). Teacher educators might also consider integrating teacher candidates into professional learning communities. Such opportunities may benefit teacher candidates and compensate for shortcomings in the associate-candidate relationship.

The recommendations offered here and in the preceding sections are intended for individuals actively engaged in teacher education programs. In the following section, I explore recommendations for further research, particularly as it relates to better understanding the associate-candidate relationship and its implications for future studies.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was intended to contribute to a clearer understanding of the associate-candidate relationship as perceived by teacher candidates. Necessarily, however, there is more to uncover. These findings were gathered from five teacher candidates enrolled in a single teacher education program at a mid-sized university in Southern Ontario. While their experiences may prove relevant to some teacher education programs, they are not fully

generalizable. This study would have been more effective if the desired sample size had been achieved. Accordingly, it would be immensely valuable to learn of other teacher candidates' experiences in different contexts, particularly to determine if these findings resonate with teacher candidates paired with different associate teachers at other sites of study. This study would be most valuable as one of many voices contributing to an understanding of the associate-candidate relationship as it exists in various teacher education programs.

Further, this study did not include associate teachers as participants, and as such examined the associate-candidate relationship only from the perspective of teacher candidates. A longitudinal investigation of associate teacher-teacher candidate pairs would address a number of limitations in this study and allow future researchers to explore this relationship from multiple perspectives. Some concepts explored in this study, such as the development of trust, rapport-building, and the gradual release of responsibility, might be better understood if observed directly and examined from both the candidates' and associate teachers' perspectives. Questions related to such study include: Are teacher candidates' perceptions consistent with associate teachers' in the associate-candidate relationship? Are either's perceptions consistent with observed behaviours? An approach that considers both the participants' perceptions and actual behaviours (e.g., constructive feedback, care, open communication) might contribute a great deal to our understanding of these issues.

Some concepts uncovered during data collection fell outside of the scope of this study. In particular, participants' reflections on demographic issues of age and gender were inconsistent. These factors might best be explored from a gender studies perspective as it relates to the associate-candidate relationship. Similarly, all participants emphasized stress as a factor in their field experiences. Given the growing attention to mental health, further

research examining stress and its effects on teacher candidate performance in the field experience would be valuable. Finally, this study occurred within the context of a 1-year teacher education program. Since Ontario universities will be implementing 2-year teacher education programs in September 2015, a study of the associate-candidate relationship in these new programs may be appropriate.

Final Words

The relationship between teacher candidates and associate teachers is complex and, as this study indicates, involves a variety of factors. The purpose of this study was to contribute to a growing understanding of how the associate-candidate relationship develops from the perspective of teacher candidates. Indeed, the primary research question in this study was: From the perspective of teacher candidates, what makes an effective associate teacher-teacher candidate relationship? Through this study, I sought to explore how participating teacher candidates perceived the relationships in their field experiences and how associate teachers might support candidates' needs in ways that are consistent with program visions and professional standards. Throughout, I aimed to identify how participants' experiences could contribute to a developing understanding of effective teacher education.

Participants identified feedback, guidance, support, relationship dynamics, and genuine interactions as central to the development of successful relationships with their associate teachers. The research findings suggest that strong associate-candidate relationships are characterized by frequent, ongoing interactions that are honest and aimed at developing teacher candidates' abilities as professionals. While individual teacher candidates have specific needs, participants consistently preferred relationships where both parties actively

engaged in establishing mutual understanding and rapport. When these factors were each included, participants recalled positive relationships and successful field experiences.

As a researcher and a former teacher candidate, I am particularly interested in how teacher candidates construct an understanding of their relationships with their associate teachers, and the effects such relationships have on their professional development. Through this study, I have sought to contribute to the development of exemplary associate-candidate relationships. Teacher candidates enter the field experience at an early stage of their development as educators, and are unlikely to experience such formalized professional development again. Field experiences therefore offer immense opportunity for preparing new teachers to enter the profession as knowledgeable leaders and learners. It is my hope that this study may contribute to this process of teacher education, and that further research will continue to refine literature about the associate-candidate relationship and how teacher educators can best support teacher candidates throughout the field experience.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Protocol

Opening Script

Thank you for taking the time to be a part of my research on the associate-candidate relationship in teacher education. Before we start with the focus group, I would like you to know that you do not have to answer each question posed, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time. Please try to avoid using names of peers, associate teachers, or schools you were placed at, to ensure their privacy. Please respect the privacy of your fellow participants and, as you agreed to in the Confidentiality Agreement, please do not disclose the details of this conversation outside of this group.

Today we're here to talk about your experiences in teacher education and what it was like to develop your relationships with your different associate teachers. Since you've just completed the program, you're in a unique position to contribute to a growing understanding of associate teacher practices and how the field experience can make for excellent teacher education. The goal for today is to gain a better understanding of how to provide future teacher candidates with strong, meaningful relationships with their associate teachers.

Guiding Questions for Focus Groups of Teacher Candidates

1. Please introduce yourself.
 - Who are you?
 - What subjects did you teach this year?
 - What do you like doing when you're not in the classroom?
2. What were your experiences in your teacher education program?
 - How did your field experiences compare to other parts of the program?
 - Can you share a story that stands out from your experience?
3. What kind of relationship did you have with your associate teachers?
 - What was a typical interaction between you and your associate teachers like?
 - Can you give an example of something your associate teacher did that was effective?
 - Can you give an example of something your associate teacher did that was not helpful?
4. How did your associate teachers provide feedback on how you were doing?
 - How often did they provide feedback, and in what forms?
 - Did their feedback change during your placement, and if so, how?
5. What guidance or resources did your associate teachers give you during your practicum?
 - What did you find most helpful about this?
 - What didn't you receive that you would have found helpful?
6. What support did you receive from your associate teachers?
 - What kind of support did you receive (personal, professional, emotional)?
 - Can you share a story where your associate teacher provided specific support?
 - Did you ever feel unsupported? What was that experience like?
7. As a teacher candidate, what else did you need during your field experience?
 - Did your associate teacher support these needs? If so, how?

8. How does your relationship with your last associate teacher compare to your relationship with your first associate?
 - What was different about these relationships? What was the same?
 - How were your needs different? How did your associate respond to these differences?
9. If associate teachers could do one thing to best prepare teacher candidates in the future, what would that be?
10. Is there anything else you would like to say about your relationship with your associate teachers, or with teacher education in general?

Appendix B

Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Opening Script

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview will build on what we discussed in the focus group, including your specific relationship with your associate teachers and some follow-up to the focus group discussions. The interview will take about an hour.

Guiding Questions for Focus Groups of Teacher Candidates

1. First, some General Overview questions:
 - What is your educational background?
 - What program did you do your undergraduate degree in?
 - What program are you currently enrolled in?
 - Campus, Cohort Group, Board(s) for Practicum Placements
 - How many schools were you placed at, and for how long?
 - Do you have teaching experience outside of your field experiences this year?
2. How would you describe your experiences in the teacher education program?
 - Is there anything about the program you didn't mention in the focus group that you would like to share now?
3. Can you describe the relationship between you and your first associate teacher?
 - Follow-up re: feedback, guidance, and support.
 - Repeat for second and, if applicable, third associate teacher
4. What made for a meaningful relationship with your associate teacher?
 - What was particularly helpful for you? What was less helpful?
5. As a teacher candidate, what did you do develop a relationship with your associates?
 - What was difficult about this process?
 - What part was most important?
6. Knowing what you know now, if you could go back and change one thing about your relationship with your associate teacher, what would that be?
7. Now we're going to talk about some things that came up during the focus group.
 - How did you first establish a relationship with your associate teachers? What does that look like?
 - What told you that you had a good relationship with your associate?
 - In the focus group you mentioned stress and pressure. How much pressure is an effective amount?
 - What impact did your relationship with your associate teachers have on your practicum experiences?
 - The focus group suggested the age or gender of associate teachers may affect the relationship. What are your thoughts on this?
8. Is there anything that we talked about in the focus group that you want to say more about?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about your relationship with your associate teachers, or with teacher education in general?

Appendix C

Modified Follow-Up Interview Protocol

Opening Script

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. Today we're here to talk about your experiences in teacher education and what it was like to develop your relationships with your different associate teachers. Since you've just completed the program, you're in a unique position to contribute to a growing understanding of associate teacher practices and how the field experience can make for excellent teacher education. The goal for today is to gain a better understanding of how to provide future teacher candidates with strong, meaningful relationships with their associate teachers.

Guiding Questions for Focus Groups of Teacher Candidates

1. First, some General Overview questions:
 - What is your educational background?
 - What program did you do your undergraduate degree in?
 - What program are you currently enrolled in?
 - Campus, Cohort Group, Board(s) for Practicum Placements
 - How many schools were you placed at, and for how long?
 - Do you have teaching experience outside of your field experiences this year?
2. What were your experiences in your teacher education program?
 - How did your field experiences compare to other parts of the program?
 - Can you share a story that stands out from your experience?
3. What kind of relationship did you have with your associate teachers?
 - What was a typical interaction between you and your associate teachers like?
 - Can you give an example of something your associate teacher did that was effective?
 - Can you give an example of something your associate teacher did that was not helpful?
4. Can you describe the relationship between you and your first associate teacher?
 - Repeat for second and, if applicable, third associate teacher
5. How did your associate teachers provide feedback on how you were doing?
 - How often did they provide feedback, and in what forms?
 - Did their feedback change during your placement, and if so, how?
6. What guidance or resources did your associate teachers give you during your practicum?
 - What did you find most helpful about this?
 - What didn't you receive that you would have found helpful?
7. What support did you receive from your associate teachers?
 - What kind of support did you receive (personal, professional, emotional)?
 - Can you share a story where your associate teacher provided specific support?
 - Did you ever feel unsupported? What was that experience like?
8. What made for a meaningful relationship with your associate teacher?
 - What was particularly helpful for you? What was less helpful?
9. As a teacher candidate, what did you do to develop a relationship with your associates?
 - What was difficult about this process?

- What part was most important?
10. Knowing what you know now, if you could go back and change one thing about your relationship with your associate teacher, what would that be?
 11. Now we're going to talk about some things that came up during the focus group.
 - How did you first establish a relationship with your associate teachers?
 - What told you that you had a good relationship with your associate?
 - What are your thoughts on the amount of stress and pressure you experienced this year?
 - What impact did your relationship with your associate teachers have on your practicum experiences?
 12. Is there anything else you would like to say about your relationship with your associate teachers, or with teacher education in general?